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ISLANDS OF THE VALE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TRAVELS ROUND OUR VILLAGE

FROM A THATCHED COTTAGE

TURNPIKE TRAVELLERS

ROSE OF LONE FARM

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AN ISLAND OF THE VALE.

Frontispiece.

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ISLANDS OF THE VALE

BY

ELEANOR G. HAYDEN

AUTHOR OF 'TURNPIKE TRAVELLERS' 'TRAVELS ROUND OUR VILLAGE' 'FROM A THATCHED COTTAGE' 'ROSE OF LONE FARM' ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. M. MACINTOSH, R.B.A.

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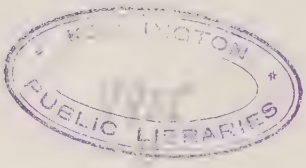
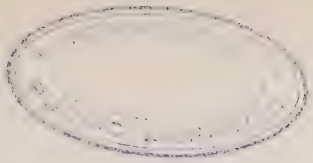


DEDICATION

TO THE MANY FRIENDS
WHO HAVE HELPED ME WITH THIS BOOK
AMONG WHOM I COUNT
THE GLORIOUS COMPANY OF THOSE
WHOSE LABOURS WE INHERIT



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ILLUSTRATIONS

Reproduced from Water-colour Sketches, and drawings by J. M. Macintosh, R.B.A.

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ISLANDS OF THE VALE

CHAPTER I

THE VALE

In the dim long ago, before history was thought of or freedom was conceived, when the downs that I love had but just burst their swaddling-bands of ice, the Vale—so legend affirms—was a lake, the waters of which filled the hollow where now the golden corn quivers darkling to the wind's caress, and villages slumber amid fruitful green orchards.

Above the surface of the glacial pool rose here and there low islands that gave foothold to wild beast and to man scarce less wild. Encircled by the waste they dwelt, secure from all foes save from each other; playing in turn the part of the killer and the killed. In process of time, man—taught by fire—learnt to forge deadlier weapons than his rude implements of stone, and by their aid he compelled the beasts to do him service and

the earth to bring forth bread. While he was thus struggling to attain a place upon the lowest rungs of the ladder of civilisation, the waters were subsiding from the lake to form marshland, or were gathering themselves orderly into their appointed channels, so that the remembrance of their former state was preserved only in tradition handed down to conquerors by conquered. It survives to-day in some of the names which the victors bestowed upon their new-won lands. Such are the ' Goose Island,' ' Caer ' or ' Cerdic's Island,' and other villages in this part of Wessex which were Saxon settlements, as were the hamlets that lie near—the ' Fords,' the ' Tons ' that denote the thegns' enclosures, the ' Worths ' where the churls were wont to herd.

The Vale is broad and shallow, and slopes from the setting sun to the dawn, so that when the sky is clear, it is steeped the livelong day in light and colour. Viewed from the hills that bound it north and south, it shimmers through a blue-grey mist : even here, in the low ground itself, you may now and then across the open spaces see fragments of the gossamer veil clinging to the sombre background of the trees.

There is at first sight little beauty about these open spaces that we should desire them ; but Nature, who is a kinder leveller than Death, gives

with one hand while withholding with the other. It is in what hasty observers would call uninteresting or even ugly scenery that the subtler and less obvious effects of atmosphere, of cloud and sky, of vivid sunset tints and ghostly, creeping mists reveal themselves most clearly to the discerning vision.

No one possessing this will term 'ugly' certain stretches of the Vale who has crossed them on a summer evening when the air is heavy with the scent of the blossoming beans, and the moon peers over the rim of the eastern flats to find her light quenched in the crimson and saffron glories of the declining sun. Along the sky the fiery trails extend, kindling the woods to flame, and driving from the hills the shadows which have chased each other across the russet slopes since morn, and now troop below to attend their departing lord.

How I love the shadows on the hills! The Vale holds up no such clear mirror wherein to trace the swift passage of the clouds, though one may sometimes watch them scudding across the warm brown earth of a field lying fallow. Yet here, too, kind Mother Nature makes the balance even. Never until I left the downland did I learn how beautiful is the shadow which a forest tree will cast over a field of ripening corn. Once

marked, the sight yields continually increasing pleasure.

Other compensations there are for the loss of the delicate play of light and shade on the downs. The changes in the face of heaven, which formerly I saw dimly from above, I now see close at hand. From the moorland road one can follow the course of the storms as they sweep down from the ridge, blot out the distance and bring the horizon within reach of one's hand, passing onward to leave the sun shining through the ragged fringes of the thunder-cloud. Or one can watch far off beyond the flats, where the river-valley winds and church spires gleam white against the sullen north, the double rainbow slowly climb the steep sides of the purple mountain masses in the sky, and stretch 'its giant span into infinity.'

In this low-lying tract the mists hang heavily, and on such a fragrant evening as I have described, the hedgeless fields are not infrequently seamed with broad bands of vapour. The effect they produce, resting soft, snow-white and cloudy, between the rich green of the plain below and the gorgeous hues of the sunset above, is singularly picturesque. As dusk falls, they take on weird mysterious shapes, recalling the wild Norse legends of gnomes and nissers; of the pale mist-maidens who cling around the traveller, inviting him to

their chill embrace ; of the *Elle*-women who dance in the moonlight, youthful and fair to view in front, but hollow behind as any kneading trough !

Curious too it is to climb a little height on an autumn evening when the glow is fading from the west and the round red moon is rising from her bed of blue-black clouds, and to find oneself on an island in the midst of a milky sea, from which here and there a haystack or a solitary tree emerges. For a space the Vale is a lake once more ; but underneath the mists are the meadows, and in due time the sun will assert his lordship again and draw the vapours to himself.

Westward of the moorland lie scattered fragments of primæval forests, clustering orchards and sheltered pastures, through which slow, willow-bordered streams take their placid way. It is a fair, smiling land, from whose brow serene all ancient roughnesses have been smoothed away. If matter be indeed, as some philosophers affirm, the outward expression of spirit, we dwellers in the Vale must needs believe in a Father of Love, so tenderly does He reveal Himself to us here.

Beautiful though Nature be, the proper study of mankind is man, and it is with man—past and present—that I chiefly am concerned. Old history and forgotten romance, in which king and usurper, miser and spendthrift, played their part, slumber

within the manor-houses of our lonely villages. Tragedy and comedy dwell beneath the cottar's roof, for life is life in mansion or hut, and joy and sorrow are no respecters of person.

The Vale folk, among whom my lot is for the present cast, bear a close resemblance in character and appearance to their brethren on the hills—that at least is the impression I have gathered from my short sojourn among them, the differences being so slight as to be almost imperceptible. The lowlanders are perhaps more conservative in their habits—if that be possible—more tenacious of old customs and even less addicted to roving than their neighbours of the hills. The same shrewd simplicity distinguishes them, but I should say that the quality of 'cunning' enters less into their composition. Among their gifts is a sense of humour which, like their pleasures and their vices, is rather elementary than subtle. A pleasant trait in their character is their fondness for flowers, and many of the gardens show evidences of love and skill.

The older inhabitants, whose memories have not been dulled by 'book-learning,' are a mine of information on local tradition and the state of the village a century ago. I say a century advisedly, for the Vale is healthy, and its sons are long-lived. At eighty years of age, instead of meditating on

A VALE VILLAGE.

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their 'latter end,' they are thinking of 'taking a third missus,' while the old women are as sprightly as the rising generation and often more industrious.

Among the old folks of my acquaintance one man deserves special mention. He was a shepherd, and for many years during middle life he took eight shillings, with extras for lambing, and worked seven days a week! Latterly his wages were higher, but it was then too late to acquire the habit of saving, and when at the age of ninety-one his strength failed, he had no resource to fall back upon save the rates. He is now 'goin' in his ninety-five.' Neither he nor his wife can read, 'schoolin' was too dear, bless 'ee, when we was young,' and they often find time hang heavy on their hands. Their parish allowance is three shillings a week and three loaves—after more than eighty years of hard work!

In the case of another couple the wife is the chief bread-winner. She stopped one day on her way from work, behind the easel of an artist friend who was painting in the village, and finding in him a sympathetic listener, which quality the poor appreciate far more highly than that of a 'good talker,' she confided to him her family affairs.

She was eighty-five years of age, and not long

before had married a man rather younger than herself who 'suffered wi' his heart.'

'He axed I to tek he, 'ee knaw, an' I thowt I med as well, as live a lone ooman. He be on the par'sh—has two shillin' an' two loaves a wik, a do. I should ha' to go on the par'sh too, if 'twurn't as I can do a bit o' field work.' 'Field work' means 'spreading dung,' 'breaking clots,' 'pulling squitch' and the like. By such employment the old woman earns five shillings when the weather is fine, and she esteems herself fortunate in that she is able to do it. She has a beautiful face, and my friend asked whether she would allow him to paint her portrait.

'I be sorry, sir,' was her reply, 'but I can't affoord to give 'ee the job.' I wonder what she thought his charge would be? When she learnt that the obligation would lie on his side, she gladly granted the request.

These old people's failings, which are due to atrophied mental faculties, to sheer weariness and to the incessant wearing struggle to make three shillings do the work of six, shrink into insignificance beside their unconscious heroism, their unmurmuring acceptance of their fate. Not that I would have it thought that I regard work as an evil. In the morning of the world, when the gods walked the earth, and every grove and rill

concealed a deity, labour and woe, work and slavery were coupled together. In these days, work is the heritage of the free man, the best anodyne of sorrow, one of the choicest gifts life has to bestow. It is our common birthright, the pledge of our universal brotherhood, and he who suffers circumstance to cheat him of his inheritance, or who barters it for pleasure and ignoble ease, denies his sonship and proclaims himself a bastard.

A period arrives, however, in the lives of those who attain old age, when the grasshopper becomes a burden, and the toiler would fain lay down his task for younger hands to take up; when he craves a short respite wherein he may count over the days of the years of his pilgrimage before he goes hence to be no more seen.

Few of us, probably, would regard with favour the certainty of dying in harness. We rather look forward to the day when we shall take possession of our 'estates in time,' and shall subscribe ourselves 'retired leisure.' The ideal Commonwealth is that in which no man will need to pray: 'Give me neither poverty nor riches,' seeing each will be fed with food convenient for him and all alike will 'crown a youth of labour with an age of ease.' Unhappily we are still far removed from that Utopian consummation. Squalid want exists side by side with reckless

extravagance, and the working classes (using the term in its conventional acceptance) are driven in their declining years to choose between the alternatives of existing upon pauper's doles, or of earning a livelihood, so called, by intermittent labour for which their infirmities render them physically unfit.

The longest record of joint service for which I can personally vouch was that of an old couple whom I will call Shadrach and Elizabeth. He was the son of a farm-labourer, and after acquiring sufficient education to enable him to read 'large print,' he began life when eight years of age as a carter-boy, earning a shilling a week.

The wife's parents were in slightly better circumstances. Her father was a thrasher, and commanded a higher rate of wages than the ordinary ploughman. By his daughter's account, he was a stern man, who fought for his 'rights' and did not scruple to exact what he deemed his due from his employer. He was a tireless worker, toiling early and late to bring up his family with credit and to give them 'good schooling,' which last entailed no small self-denial, seeing that each child cost threepence a week.

During harvest girls contributed their share to the family exchequer by raking up behind the wheat-cart. Every morning, soon after five

o'clock, the master would cross the dewy orchard to his thrasher's cottage and cry :

'Susan ! Susan ! Where be the maids ? The waggons ha' started.' Out of bed the sleepy maids would spring, huddle on their clothes, and after snatching a morsel of breakfast would hasten away down the village street to overtake the string of creeping vehicles.

As long as daylight lasted they worked, and sometimes by the moon's rays. When at length they left the fields, they trooped off, men, women, and children, to the farm-kitchen, where a bountiful supper awaited them.

Such simple, friendly relations between master and men are out of date nowadays. Harvesters come home to a locked door, outside which the family cat wails plaintively, to an empty house and fireless grate ; and the mother, who has been 'fagging' since early morning, must needs satisfy the wants of her hungry retinue before she may think of rest and sleep.

During hay-harvest the thrasher exchanged his flail for a scythe. It was when cutting the long swathes of grass that the one supernatural experience of his life befell him. Many a time his daughter heard him tell the story of how, when he and his mate or his 'butty,' to use a local term, were mowing beneath the hot mid-day sun, the other

man dropped his scythe ‘ sudden-like an’ cried out.’ The thrasher looked up, and he too dropped his blade, for past them ‘ flashed in a blaze of light their master’s apparition.’ He was from home at the time, visiting friends in a village some twelve miles away, and the men interpreted the vision as a token of his death. There were no telegrams in those days to convey news, but ‘ towards the afternoon a man came over a-horseback an’ telled ’um as the measter had died a couple o’ hours before, just when they saw him down in the medder.’

The thrasher’s children, as has been said, learnt to read and write, to sum and to sew, and the eldest daughter acquired in domestic service an additional stock of useful knowledge before she became a wife. She was two and twenty, her husband a couple of years younger, when they started housekeeping upon a weekly income of seven shillings. Elizabeth was married in a ‘ very pretty gownd of a purply colour wi’ green buds all over it, a-hanging down their heads, an’ a white straw bonnet trimmed wi’ white ribbons.’

Her wedding finery, of which fifty years later she retained so lively a recollection, did not render her unmindful of the more serious side of marriage, and she could still repeat the kindly words of counsel which the clergyman, who had known her from childhood, added to the Prayer-book exhorta-

tion. From the church the party adjourned to the home the bridegroom had prepared, where 'we had dinner, an' lots o' songs were sung, songs as you don't hear nowadays,' and which, I fear, have already died out.

Henceforward the young couple's career was one of unremitting work and peaceful domesticity, the chief events that rippled its surface being the arrival of the children, of whom ten have lived to attain middle age. The wife, who was a clever woman and inherited her father's industry, supplemented her husband's scanty wages by doing tailoring for the cheap-clothes factory in the adjacent town, by haymaking, reaping, and by lending their employer's wife a hand in the housework at busy seasons. 'If I hadn't done my part we couldn't never ha' brought up our little fam'bly respectable,' she would say. The last of the 'little fam'bly' long since left the parents' roof, and for many years the old folks kept the hearth warm between them. Seven years ago, they celebrated their golden wedding, an event upon which the old man still loves to dwell, and the day following, for a honeymoon is a luxury the poor cannot afford, they completed fifty years' service each upon the same land. Both had been working on it for a shorter or longer period before their wedding, so that altogether the two put in,

before work gave them up, 126 years' service, indoors and out, upon the same farm. It is a remarkable record.

Shadrach, though crippled with rheumatism and sorely troubled 'by his pooer fit,' which made walking difficult, managed, until within three years ago, to support himself and his wife, who 'did her part' by attending to the poultry at the homestead near by. Latterly she found this duty somewhat arduous during bad weather, and complained that she was 'watchet,' that is, her shoes were wet through every time she went to the farm, and that she was 'stocked wi' mud the winter through.' Nevertheless, she would not be induced to relinquish any of her daily tasks while she could creep about, and she might often have been seen feebly attempting to dig the 'potato patch' or to saw wood. So ineffectively did the weak flesh second the willing spirit, that she was nearly a week cutting through a log no thicker than her thin wrists. 'I means to work about as long as ever I can,' she would declare, 'fur 'tis a deal better to be doin' summat, even if sa be as you're a bit slow, than to sit by the fire an' think o' your ailments.'

The affection existing between the aged husband and wife was as beautiful as it was touching. 'He never gives ma a cross word, an' I do all I can to

mek 'un comfer'ble. I know I shan't never get no better'—she suffered from heart disease—'cause my heart's wore out, an' you can't put new works in an old body; but I thanks the Lord as He's spered ma so long to look arter my husband an' see as he's got what he wants. An' I thanks Him too fur let'n we spend our latter end in this nice, comfer'ble little house where we've a-lived sa long, 'stead o' bein' in the Union. We've bin very happy together, an' I can't see as we've had more troubles nor other folks; no, I can't see as we have. I don't werry about dyin'. The Lord will take me when He thinks fit, an' I'm content to wait His patience.'

That word 'the Lord's patience' was often on Elizabeth's lips. How few, how very few are 'content to wait the Lord's patience'! How many of us snatch and pull at our lives—sometimes even at the lives of others—and destroy the pattern beyond all use on this side!

Some three years ago, things began to look serious for Shadrach and his wife. He was scarcely able to crawl to work, yet work he must, since his wages were all that stood between them and either the meagre allowance of outdoor relief or the dreaded 'Union.' It was a period of anxiety, and, I have no doubt, of many prayers for the old couple. About this time something of their story

got abroad, and the old man learnt—how, I do not know—that he had been 'put in a book.' His pride and gratitude were amusing. Unknown friends, to whom his long term of service became known, rallied to his assistance; through their generosity a sum of money was raised that relieved him from the necessity of further toil, and, best of all, that removed from their hearth the dread spectre of the workhouse. ''Tis the Lord's doin',' said Elizabeth, when she learnt the news, 'I knew He 'ud help we, 'cause I've a-prayed to Him sa much an' sa often.' And I think she was right.

About a year and a half ago she passed away, the last years of her life brightened by the kindness of strangers, to whom she would so gladly have given in person her heartfelt thanks. Shadrach still creeps about, cared for by a widowed daughter who left her situation to live at home when her mother, shortly before the end, became childish and unable to attend to household matters. Notwithstanding poverty, hard work, and infirmities, the old man, I feel sure, is ready to declare that Goodness and Mercy have followed him all the days of his life, as they follow all men, though not all men perceive them.

CHAPTER II

THE FORD OF THE STILL POOL

An old-time traveller inserts in the preface to the story of his wanderings through his native land a rhyming account of the 'propertees of the Shyres of England,' which Mr. Thomas Ward, of Oriel College, Oxford, communicated to him. For the benefit of those persons who desire more exact information as to the position of the Vale, I will reveal thus much; it is enclosed east and west by its own county, the 'propertee' of which is

'Fyll the Wayne,'

indicating rich soil and heavy crops. To the truth of this the huge barns everywhere bear witness. Westward, the Vale touches a land with the motto of which I did not concern myself; while all along its northern border lies a shire where Mr. Ward bids us

'Gyrde the mare,'

presumably because the roads were soft—they are so at least to-day—streams abundant and bridges few. He wrote for fools, however, since the wise man needs not to be told that it were better to

wet one's horse's feet at the ford than one's own, particularly during those unquiet times when travellers journeyed in company for safety's sake.

On one of his tours the itinerant, who enjoyed the distinction of being the King's antiquary, and who was clever enough to keep his head at a period when the opposite fashion prevailed, had occasion to cross the eastern portion of the Vale. Starting from a city renowned for the beauty of its buildings, for its learning, and for that which, we are told, is bound up in the heart of youth, he rode out along the great highway that runs southward towards the downs. 'For the first few miles,' he says, 'it leads over hilly grounde, well wooddid and fruteful of Corne'—he was in 'Fyll the Wayne' shire—'and other three miles by low levelle Grounde, in sum partes marschy.' The first half of the sentence, in which the Vale is thus cursorily dismissed, reminds me of the sub-acid description of another traveller—a French physician—who visited the country a few years later.

'All the world,' he writes, 'bore arms: the farm-labourer left his buckler and sword in a corner of the field, and sometimes even his bow. The land was so full of trees that you might think you were in a perpetual wood.' The foot-passengers took short cuts by paths through the parks and

pleasaunces, climbing the fences by means of step-ladders: the horsemen were obliged to keep to the roads where they did not lack company. Great nobles making progress with their retinues from one castle to another; soldiers riding knee to knee behind their captain, bound for the Scottish wars; country gentlemen hurrying to town to watch a bear-baiting; rapacious King's officers enforcing the hated system of purveyance for their own private ends; Dickon with Joan on a pillion behind him jogging to the fair; merchants, scholars, dispossessed monks, jugglers, strolling players, a world in miniature were found on the road, together with highwaymen and the army of vagabonds whom the dissolution of the monasteries and the enclosure of the common lands had driven forth from their homes to starvation, or to the branding iron, to slavery and death.

His fellow-travellers, however, interest the antiquary not a whit: he is intent only on recording the ancient monuments and the natural features of the country, these last in the baldest phraseology. Having crossed the 'marschy Grounde,' he continues, 'Or ever I cam at Hean's Island, I passed over a Broke and other: this was Ocke Broke that goith to A——, risinge in the Vale, or ells it runnith into Ocke. It ran from the Northe West into the Southe.' At this point let us leave him—on the

dusty track from which motors and cycles have banished the ghosts of those goodly companies that thronged its white stretches, before the iron road flung its gleaming length from sky to sky across the Vale; and let us turn aside into one of the narrow crooked lanes that lead from the main highway to the buried villages, of which I have already spoken.

Our course lies through Hean's Island, whither we will presently return, and out beneath high arching trees to a sun-steeped, wind-swept tract fringed by belts of woodland. A weedy stream crawls sluggishly between the rushes that clog its way, and under the single-spanned bridge, too straightened in its dulness to murmur the faintest tinkle as it passes. The bridge bears a name of sinister omen that matches ill its pastoral surroundings. Traditions cluster thick about Gallows Bridge. One affirms that there sheep-stealers were executed. Another runs thus: a man of Hean's Island was returning home from the Ford of the Still Pool, when, being poor, he yielded to temptation and 'lifted' a sheep from an adjacent pasture. The theft was observed; the hue and cry was raised. Perceiving that he was likely to be 'overcaught,' as the woman who told me the story picturesquely phrased it, he let the animal go and sought safety in flight, hiding himself in

some lonely field. How long the miserable wretch lay concealed history does not relate: realising sooner or later that capture was inevitable, and knowing the fate that awaited him, he determined to forestall the course of 'justice,' and hanged himself in a meadow near the bridge.

The country folk add a dramatic finishing touch to the grim tale by declaring that this Potter's Field belonged at that time to some 'Corporation' (probably the Chapter of a cathedral or the governing body of one of the colleges of the University of Oxford that holds much property in these parts), and that after the suicide it repudiated the ownership, so that the meadow in consequence has become 'No-man's Land.'

Yet another legend connected with the spot was told me by a dear old lady whose family had been Vale-dwellers for several generations. She obtained her information from her grandfather, who died sixty years ago, 'an' seein' he was eighty years of age, he could remember a smart few things.' Often had he told her, she said, of how, during the Civil War, they had hanged rebels at Gallows Bridge, 'an' that I knows is true, for he fought in the Civil War himself.'

This fragment of reminiscence reminds me of another somewhat similar. An aged labourer who lived on the hills told a friend of mine that

he remembered sitting as a boy in the chimney-corner and hearing the bullets from the battle of Newbury whistle past the cottage! A man who could thus project his fancy into the past, and apply to himself a tradition which had been handed down for more than two hundred years, would have been a romancer of the first water in another rank of life—a wizard of the South who might have challenged his Northern rival's laurels.

If I begin to quote anecdotes concerning the country folks' reading of history we are like to linger till nightfall at Gallows Bridge, and I for one have no desire to test the suitability of that spot as a residence for ghosts. From here the lane runs between hedges behind which lie meadows bordered with stately elms where placid cattle graze, and colts fling up their heels in the mad frolic of youth, little recking of the hard world that awaits them beyond the fields. Happy those that remain in the recesses of this quiet land, and draw out a slow old age, creeping over the soil with the peasants who tend them.

Two miles take us to the hamlet whither we are bound—the Ford of the Still Pool. The name brings before one's inward vision, as by an impressionist touch, the picture of a full, gently-moving stream winding between green pasture, of

bending willows shot through with sunlight, of cattle knee-deep in buttercups, chewing the cud of afternoon content.

The village, which was originally an offshoot of a more important parish, consists of a dozen or so cottages, some of ripe age, as their thatch and timber-work denote. They straggle down a wide strip of turf between the manor and the almshouses which represent the two poles of the farm-labourer's existence. In the one, when the short play-time of childhood is over, he begins life : in the other he hopes, please God, to lay it down. Opposite is the church, where the scales are adjusted and the master's resting-place is as strait as the man's. A tiny building it is, overtopped by tall elms, and by a hoary yew that survives—a maimed and lopped monument of a monarch's failure to read the signs of the times and to perceive that the glories of the English longbow-men were dead.

There is something at once dignified and pathetic in the little lonely sanctuary set down amid green fields to show to the ignorant and unlearned the road in which the wayfaring man shall not err ; and its simplicity strikes a more effective note than the most elaborate ornament would do. The narrow nave, to which timbered porch and low doorway give access, holds nothing mean or tawdry. The ponderous oaken pillars—

quaint and unusual—that support the bell-cot, the carved pulpit, the restrained beauty of the piscina on which the builders of the church seem to have expended the skill denied expression elsewhere, are all in keeping with the quiet character of place and people.

A noble Elizabethan manor-house, conspicuous by its fine chimney-stacks and well-proportioned gables, supplies the sole suggestion of what we term 'the world.' The centuries seem powerless to impair the whiteness of its stones, and it gleams from far among the willows that show where once the moat encircled it. In rear of the mansion is a paved quadrangular court, which appeals more strongly to me than mullioned window, chamfered doorway, or lofty gable. For with its row of clipped limes, its ancient pump and stone water-trough, it stirs vague, pleasant memories of sunny Italian *cortili*. Those who know and love Italy will understand.

At one period of its history the manor was held by a family that was connected, more closely than honour approved, with a horrible crime that took place during the latter half of the sixteenth century, on the borders of the adjacent county. The ghastly details were first published in a form accessible to the general reader, by Sir Walter Scott in a note to his poem 'Rokeby.' As few

THE MANOR OF THE FORD OF THE STILL POOL.

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people have leisure to glance at notes nowadays I will give a brief outline of the story.

In the dead of a winter night, a midwife named Barnes, living in a remote village among the downs, was summoned by a mounted messenger to an unknown patient at a distance. A large reward, coupled with certain sinister conditions, was promised for her services. The bait was too tempting to refuse. Through storm and rain, across the wild hills, Mrs. Barnes rode behind the serving-man, who drew rein outside a large mansion. The midwife, after being blindfolded, was admitted, was led up the stairs, counting them as she went, and into a gloomy chamber where a masked lady was stretched on the bed in the throes of child-birth. Scarcely had the mother been delivered, when a tall man of fierce aspect entered the room: seizing the new-born infant, he flung it into the fire that burnt on the hearth, and held it down with his booted heel until it was reduced to cinders. Mrs. Barnes departed as she had come, and, bribed to silence, kept the secret until approaching death terrified her into confession. During her last illness she sent for a justice and made her deposition, showing, in proof of the truth of her story, a piece which she had cut unperceived from the curtain of the room. By means of this fragment of stuff, the scene of the tragedy was identified as

Littlecote Hall, and wild Will Darrell, the owner, was tried for his life. He was acquitted, his judge receiving the reversion of Littlecote! Legend says that vengeance, however, did not suffer the murderer to escape thus unpunished. For a while he strove to drown his remorse in frenzied revellings. Returning one night across the hills from a mad carouse, a babe wrapped in flame blocked his path; his horse reared at the dreadful sight, and Wild Will fell, breaking his wicked neck within sight of his own house. Legend says also that the sin of the judge who procured his acquittal was visited on his children unto the third and the fourth generation.

Littlecote Hall is still standing—a beautiful old mansion—and it is haunted, so the servants declare, by the ghost of the murdered child as the murderer haunts the countryside, roaming the downs with his dogs to scare honest folk and to point a warning to evil doers.

CHAPTER III

THE HAVEN OF REST

The subsequent history of the manor of the Ford of the Still Pool is respectable to dulness. Not long after Will Darrell's trial and acquittal, it passed to a family one member of whom, in the early years of the following century, built and endowed ten almshouses for 'the finding of ten poor men or women to be chosen by his heir for the time being from the poor aged, impotent and needy people of the parish of Hean's Island.' I quote from the benefactor's last will and testament, which goes on to say that 'the poor people are to have five pounds a-piece yearly, and a minister to read prayers to them every day in the year, morning and evening.' The almshouses were built in a certain 'close,' three hundred yards or so from the church. More recently they have been increased to accommodate eighteen 'lone' and aged persons. A vacancy is not long a-filling, for there are applicants in plenty when death removes one of the little band.

Grey hairs are out of fashion nowadays, and

the glory of the hoary head is turned to its reproach. Old age meets with small patience and less reverence at the hands of the rising generation, who forget that when they in their turn move up a stage on the ladder of time they will reap from those below only that which they have sown. Those who sow in their children habits of self-indulgence and of what is called independence but what is too often merely lawlessness masquerading under that honoured name, cannot expect to gather a harvest of obedience, respect, and self-control.

A man's attitude towards age, as it touches both himself and his neighbour, affords no mean test of the temper of his soul. He who has learnt to bear patiently the infirmities of others and to contemplate with serenity the limitations which the advancing years will impose upon himself, is not going to school under Life, the great teacher, in vain.

Not all of us can hope to attain Browning's sunny height, whose optimism is as rare as it is bracing:

> Grow old along with me!
> The best has yet to be,
> The last of life for which the first was made.

Too many, indeed, are ready to echo the dying words of him who trod the slippery ways of courts to perish on the block at last, and who, the night

before his execution, wrote on the fly-leaf of his Bible :

> E'en such is Time, that takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
> And pays us but with age and dust :
> Who in the dark and silent grave,
> When we have wandered all our ways,
> Shuts up the story of our days.

Happy the man who in this age of feverish materialism can add with Sir Walter Raleigh,

> But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
> My God shall raise me up, I trust.

Writers of every epoch have set forth the sorrows of decrepitude. The most impressive and at the same time the most poignant imagery was his—and the irony of the fact is no less poignant and impressive—who had tasted all that the world had to give, and who pronounced all to be vanity ! If the weariness and satiety of the ' evil days,' when the grasshopper is a burden and desire fails, press thus heavily on those whose lot is lightened by every alleviation that love and money can suggest, with what an overwhelming load of misery must it not weigh upon the aged poor ! Would that there were, throughout the length and breadth of the land, more of those havens of rest which arose before ' houses of industry,' which we call workhouses, were thought of, or the ' feeding

and cloathing of the poores' were 'let out' to the cheapest bidder! The deserving poor have need of some such shelter where they may rest in the twilight, when the long working day is done, until the clear call summons them to a more abiding home.

The almshouses at the Ford of the Still Pool have been restored, and, though without any pretensions to artistic or archæological value, their quaint porches, narrow, diamond-paned windows brightened by flowers, and strips of border where sunflowers and hollyhocks rear their tall heads against the warm red of the brick walls, render them more than usually picturesque. Many a wayfarer pauses to look through the iron gates that give access to the enclosure. Two sombre Irish yews guard the entrance, from which a tiled path leads up the rectangular court between the tenements to the 'prayer-room' above the great round-faced clock that marks the creeping hours. The chaplain, who is also the vicar of the hamlet, and who, in respect of his office to the bedesfolk, enjoys a stipend of ten pounds a year with 'a room in the house to dwell in,' gathers them together twice daily, as we have seen, in the tiny chapel. It is a pathetic little company: all are old, many are infirm; some are deaf; one at least is blind—the effect of a practical joke which the children of the

house where she was employed played upon her. She worked for the village baker, whose young son and daughter, not realising the possibilities of the trick, sprinkled gunpowder in the mouth of the oven. When she lighted the fire in the morning the powder exploded in her face, burning off her eyebrows and eyelashes, and severely injuring her sight. Had she consented to place herself under special treatment, she would probably not have lost it entirely, but she had the dread of hospitals common to her class, and refused to seek further advice, with the result that she is now almost, if not totally, blind. Happily she secured election to one of the almshouses, where she 'scrambles along' by her neighbours' help. Her cottage, though scantily furnished, is neat and clean: nor does she repine at her lot, which might be so much worse! To sit with folded hands is counted no hardship among the poor, and her loss does not entail on this woman, who still has the use of hearing and speech, the same amount of suffering which it would do upon one of more cultured tastes and wider interests. There is a good deal of truth underlying *Punch's* joke of the aged labourer who, tied by the leg to his chair, in answer to a sympathetic question as to whether he does not find time hang heavy, replied, 'No thank 'ee, ma'am; I sits an' thinks; an' then I just

sits!' Another inmate of the almshouses, who does not allow herself to be overlooked, is a wonderful old lady whose tricks of gesture, dainty neatness and fine manners would seem to indicate a strain of French blood in her veins. She is small and slight and still active, with a step as light as a girl's, and her quick movements, bright eyes and small alert features remind one irresistibly of some brisk, chirruping bird.

Mary is the *doyenne* of the almshouses: her age, which is ninety-two, is a source of 'humble pride' to her; she makes a pretence of trying to hide her satisfaction at being still able to read without glasses, although she plaintively declares that her sight 'is not what it used to be!' She was evidently born with large expectations!

One grievance she has which bulks largely in her perspective. Her ears, with astonishing inconsiderateness, have struck for shorter hours and lighter work, to which, when their lengthy term of service is remembered, they are surely entitled. Mary can no longer hear the services in the prayer-room, 'and seein' I've always been used to Church an' Sacrement, I misses it sadly.' Apart from this drawback, her infirmity from a mere outsider's point of view would not appear likely to cause her any excessive inconvenience, seeing that her nimble tongue, the vigour of which is unabated, gives

other folks small chance when in her company of exercising her powers of hearing.

She comes of a family which once owned a large part of the parish. The lands in this county have long had a knack of casting their owners, and Mary's forefathers sat no firmer in their saddles than many of their neighbours. Poverty compelled her to earn her own livelihood, which she elected to do by domestic service. Fifteen years she lived with the same family, leaving them only for a home of her own. A mild surprise that she could bring herself to forsake her 'people' to 'take up with a strange man' is perceptible in her tones as she tells the story.

''Twas a heart-breaking affair, an' I could scarce go through at the last, but'—with a little conscious smile, as if aware of her attractions, which in her youth must have been more than ordinary—'I daredn't put him off. It don't do to disappoint a man, 'cause you never knows what mightn't happen.'

The tolerated husband has long been dead, her children are dead, and almost all the friends of early years, yet Mary is cheerful, like the robin that sings through wintry weather.

Equally cheery is the widow who lives in the opposite corner. Her two-roomed house is a model of comfort and homely prettiness. Muslin

curtains shade the window, which looks out over trees and green fields. The china on the walls, the Windsor armchair and round 'hoof-footed' table, belong to the best type of rural cottager. The fire is on the hearth, a thing seldom seen in these days of cheap grates, and such bakemeats as she can afford are cooked by a neighbour who possesses an oven. The two are fast cronies; they take their meals in company, and when one has 'summat out o' the way, she gies t'other a taste.'

The sight of this widow's face is enough to put discontent to flight. 'I was happy the first day I come in,' she is fond of saying, 'an' I've been happy as the birds in the sky ever since. How do I pass the time? Oh, that goes quick anuff! I cleans the house; I cooks my bit o' dinner, I sews, an' now an' agen I reads for a spell. When there's nought else to do I just sits an' restes.

''Tis nice to be able to sit an' rest wi' nothen on your mindt—no rent to pay, no one to come botherin' round wantin' so much this week, so much the next! I'm thankful I got into one o' these nice little housen. You need never be dull, 'cause there's allus plenty o' company. Folks is cross sometimes, same as they be everywhere, whether they lives in a big place or a little 'un, an' spiteful agin others, but I never quar'ls. If they wun't spake to I, I dwun't spake to they. I just lets

'em alone till they feels better an' things soon settles theirselves.'

This buxom philosopher secured election through a fortunate chance—a chance at least that was fortunate for her. By this I do not mean the death of her predecessor in the cottage, although I admit my words are open to that construction. She happened, however, by good luck to be called in to nurse one of the inmates, and in this way she came under the favourable notice of the trustees, to whom she was before unknown. When her patient died, she applied for the vacancy, ignoring the prophecies of folks who 'telled ma there was no chanst o' my gett'n in. "No harm," I sez, "to try," an' try I did. Lark, you should ha' seen how took aback they was when I come an' telled 'em I was choosed!'

The following anecdote illustrates aptly her tolerant attitude of mind. Crossing a field one day she was knocked down by a ram. The owner of the animal, hearing of its rude behaviour, called to apologise and to ask whether she were much hurt. 'Oh, no, sir, thank 'ee,' was her reply, 'he fought I fair; he didn't kick I when I was down.'

The bedeswomen outnumber the men by four to one at the present time: they generally seem to have been in the majority, why, it is difficult to say. The founder left the trustees free to elect whom

they would from the villages benefited, but either the women are usually favoured, or they are longer-lived than their husbands, and so give the latter no chance of becoming eligible. I know of several old men in the parish who would apply for admission were it not for the drawback that they possess partners! Just now, there are only four in the almshouses, two of whom are very 'rickety.' They earn an additional trifle by running—creeping I ought to say—errands, and helping the old ladies with their gardens, for the rules of the settlement do not preclude them from supplementing their allowance when able to do so. This consists of four shillings and two faggots a week beside half a ton of coal during the winter. The lot of the almsfolk, if not luxurious, is easy compared with that of the pauper on outdoor relief, who has to provide food, clothing, fuel, and house-rent out of two shillings and two loaves a week.

Every summer the old men and women are entertained to tea by a lady living in a country town some miles away. For six months beforehand the event, with the drive 'to an' agenst,' furnishes a topic of conversation. On these occasions the cheery widow used to take the opportunity of paying a visit to a brother, who for several years before his death had occupied an almshouse in Ashwell. He was one of the few

persons then surviving who had known 'Waterloo Ben.' As the latter was a somewhat notable figure, I will relate—in my own words—his story, which I have gathered in scraps and fragments from various sources.

CHAPTER IV

'WATERLOO BEN'

THERE are not many 'elder'y' persons left in Ashwell who remember Waterloo Ben. He and his wife Pleasant lived in one of the almshouses for married couples near the shining, smooth-slipping river. She earned a few shillings by looking after the children whose parents worked in the factory close by, and on fine days she might be seen surrounded by her little flock, leading them into the meadows to pick buttercups and daisies.

He, reversing the usual order of things, stayed at home and took in plain sewing. When perplexed on the intricate subject of gussets and gores, he would wheel himself round in his hand-chair to the washerwoman's yard, where he could study at his leisure the garments that were hung out on the line to dry. He was always cheerful—as is not infrequently the case with those people who have apparently least reason to be so—and he possessed a varied stock of experiences which he placed at his acquaintances' service, and which were particularly appreciated by the youth of the neighbourhood.

A LITTLE LONELY SANCTUARY.

Ben's life had been a stormy one. He was born in a church-porch about the time that a great nation was coming into being in the West. The porch was hardly the spot his mother would have chosen for his entry into the world—or he either, had he been allowed a voice in the matter; on this occasion, however, as on so many later, he was the sport of circumstance.

His birth happened thus. Some labourers on their way to work amid the darkness of a winter morning heard when passing through the church-yard the sound of an infant's cry proceeding from the sacred edifice. Fear seized them; not doubting but that it was the wail of an un-baptised babe whose soul was wandering upon the wind, they fled—all save one. He, less credulous, ran back to fetch the sexton, who came with his lantern and keys and flung open the great doors of the porch. On the cold flags a woman was stretched stiff and stark, while beside her lay a newborn male child. The traveller's pass in her bosom set forth that 'Anne Ledall, a vagrant woman,' was returning to her native place, where doubtless she had hoped to claim settlement. But like Rachel of old, 'when there was but a little way to come,' her travail had overtaken her. She had climbed in—with what pain and difficulty God alone knew—between the mullions of the

unglazed windows, and had poured out her soul upon the wintry night in giving another life.

The sexton was a compassionate man, but he had seven hungry mouths at home to fill upon seven shillings a week, and he decided to hand over the tramp baby to the overseers of his mother's parish. The parson christened him Benoni, and he was boarded out in a farm labourer's family at sixpence a week. For fifteen years he dwelt an alien among them—their drudge and their scapegoat, bearing the punishment of their misdeeds as well as of his own—which in truth were not inconsiderable. Withal he grew up a sturdy rogue, thriving upon scanty food and contriving to extract some amusement from a comfortless world.

When Joe Goddin, the eldest son of the house, came home after an absence of several years, Ben's occasions of mirth retreated to vanishing point while his troubles proportionately advanced. Long time the waif, conscious of his growing strength, bore the tyrant's yoke in silence, until a brutal sneer levelled at his dead mother fired his blood. He sprang upon the bully and vanquished him in stand-up fight upon the village green. 'And now,' quoth Ben, who knew what awaited him at home, 'I'll go and fight the French.' Circumstance, however, had a word to say in this matter also, as will presently appear.

With a brave heart the boy faced the miles that lay between the village and Ashwell, where he arrived in time to hear the watch crying their round, 'Twelve o'clock and a fine, mild night!' Curling himself on a doorstep, he slept till morning, when the master of the house discovered him.

'Hello,' he cried, 'what have we here?'

'Please sir, 'tis me,' answered Ben, rubbing his bright eyes; 'I've run away from home which as how it ain't my home, 'cause I knew father 'ud beat me—on'y he ain't my father—fur thrashing big Joe. An' please, sir, I wants to go an' fight the French.'

'Hoity-toity, the young jackanapes! Pleasant, my dear, here's a lad whose home ain't his home and whose father ain't his father; he wants to go and fight for King George: what do you think of him?'

There came to the door a girl about Ben's age; her blue eyes, large and timid as a shy fawn's, were set in a thin pale face; she looked almost as if a puff of wind would blow her away.

'Would you like some breakfast, boy?' she said, and Ben, who had tightened his belt more than once, made haste to reply that he would 'not mind a taste o' vittles,' which was a polite way of intimating that he would like nothing so much.

'You're too young to follow the drum,' said

Silas Heber, as they discussed the meal; 'Mr. Wiseman, the baker round the corner, wants a lad to deliver the bread; you'd better see if he'll take you.'

Thus it came about that instead of handling a musket, Ben learnt to use a peel, and instead of plying the drumsticks he sold bread. Hard work was still his portion, but on Sundays he was free to come and go as he would. He always chose the same direction. Regularly as the day swung round, it found him in Heber's little house, whence poverty had not yet thrust love outside. Silas was a visionary who laid his account better with the next world than with this: indeed, but for his daughter, who kept the home together with a resolution strangely in contrast to her fragile appearance, Silas would long since have been an inmate of the 'house of industry.' Pleasant toiled at fine needlework until her eyes ached. Only on Sundays did she lay it aside to go to church with her father and Ben, to walk beside them in the meadows by the river, to talk a little, to listen much with the silent sympathy that outweighs words. She knew all Ben's ambitions, and how he aspired to be a master baker with apprentices to do his bidding. He would keep a horse and cart, and when he had saved sufficient money, Pleasant should look out for him some

modest maiden, kind and gentle, as he would wish his wife to be. To this last the girl refused to pledge herself; she even seemed to find the subject for some reason distasteful. Of his foster family Ben meanwhile heard nothing, and cared less. The thrashing he had administered to Joe was fated, however, to bear bitter fruit, though long delayed.

He had spent five happy years in Ashwell, when one raw February morning the night mail, all decked with flags, rattled into the town bringing news that had set every church-tower on the road rocking to the swing of the bells. For Admiral Jervis and his Jacks had beaten the Spanish Dons and their allies (strange partnership!), the *sans-culottes* of the new-born French Republic, off their own seas. Of course, the Ashwell bells rang too, and the town authorities distributed beer that evening and had a bonfire built in the market-place round which the patriots, gloriously drunk, danced and hurrahed till dawn.

Ben and Pleasant went out like the rest to see the fun, of which they soon had had enough. They were turning homeward when a burly fellow, who had availed himself freely of civic hospitality, pushed between them. With a heave of his shoulder he sent Ben into the gutter, and seizing Pleasant, he kissed with brutal violence her small

white face. In vain she struggled and shrieked: her resistance incited her tormentor to fresh insult, her terror moved to louder mirth the onlookers, who regarded the outrage as a harmless incident of the night's frolic. Not so Ben. Stunned at first by the force of his fall, he was roused by the girl's cries to a passion of fury. Springing to his feet, he struck blindly again and again at the unwieldy bulk, now towering above him, now prone on the ground. He came to his senses after hours of blood-red madness, to find himself a prisoner in the roundhouse, whither the watch had conveyed him not a moment too soon.

'You may thank us, young man, that you ha'n't committed murder,' said the constable; 'it's like as 'tis to be a hanging matter.'

Ben shivered: small chance there was now of his becoming a master baker, of driving his own horse and taking a wife—and at this last thought madness overtook him once more.

He was brought before the justices, charged with having grievously and maliciously wounded a peaceable citizen, one Joseph Goddin by name. At that Ben, starting, earnestly regarded his antagonist's bandaged brow and battered, pulpy features, which afforded slight clue to their owner's identity.

'Joseph Goddin?' he repeated.

The bully gave an evil smile.

'You won't get off so light this time as last! I reckon you're done for now, Ben Ledall.'

'Silence in the court!' cried the presiding magistrate. 'Young man,' addressing the prisoner, 'have you anything to say for yourself?'

'He knocked me down and kissed my—my—I wish I'd killed him!'

'A violent youth, a very violent youth! This is the second time he has assaulted you?'

'Aye, if it please your worship, he served me cruel when he was a lad.'

'Maybe he was drunk last night,' suggested one kindly gentleman, seeking an excuse for the prisoner.

'May it please your worship, he was as sober as you are now, with all respect. I won't deny as I myself was merry through drinking the King's health an' death to his enemies—God bless him! I won't deny as I'd had a drop more nor I could carry comfer'ble, gentlemen. I lurched up agen him, accidental-like, an' all along o' that, he, havin' a spite agin ma, 'ud ha' killed ma if sa be as the watch hadn't a-come by and pulled 'un off.'

'A violent youth!' repeated the chairman, 'a very violent youth!' The justices laid their heads together, and after a short deliberation Ben's sentence was announced. It was to the effect that since he was so fond of fighting, he would

be handed over to the military authorities to serve in his Majesty's land forces for the prescribed period.

A woman's cry of anguish rang through the court and brought a mist to Ben's eyes so that he but dimly saw the white, despairing face, the memory of which he was destined to carry half over the world.

Thus the waif became a soldier after all, and a traveller, like his mother. Far and wide he wandered, fighting the Spaniards in the West Indies, the Dutch in South Africa, the French everywhere. Throughout his wanderings there gnawed ceaselessly at his heart a longing for revenge that at times shook his soul to its foundations, and an unsatisfied hunger for news of the one being on earth he loved.

Eleven years he marched and fought and toiled and suffered ere tidings from Ashwell reached him. The last month of 1808 found him in Spain, in Sir John Moore's army, which, after having sprung upon Soult's communications, and recalled Napoleon in hot haste from his career of conquest in the south, was now retreating before the enemy towards Corunna, turning from time to time to snap like a fierce mountain wolf at its pursuers.

The new year was not a week old when Ben, ragged, footsore, half starved and half frozen, was

plodding through the mud one day, precisely as he had plodded for what seemed to him an eternity. His numbed brain was conscious only of the necessity overpowering all others, of keeping up with the column, when a sharp crackle of musketry roused him from his torpor. His dull eyes brightened; he straightened his shoulders and ran back into the firing line. The French cavalry were pressing hard on the heels of the British, but the surly bull-dogs of the Light Division that formed the rearguard succeeded in beating off the attack and resumed their march.

Ben was lingering a moment to bind up a slight wound he had just received, when he heard someone calling his name, 'Ledall! Ben Ledall!' Scrambling among the rocks whence the sound came, he found a comrade lying helpless, following with agonised gaze the retreating files of red-coats.

'Take me with you!' he implored. 'Don't leave me here to die like a dog! For God's sake help me, Ben!'

'Who is it?' asked Ledall, stooping over the prostrate figure.

''Tis me, Joe Goddin!'

'You!' he cried, and recoiled.

'Aye,' with an awful imprecation. 'I've fought alongside 'ee these two months. I lost my place

in Ashwell, I had no money, I was starving. I stole a loaf and—my God: they sent me to this—to *hell*, for stealing a loaf!' *

'Can you tell me aught o' Pleasant Heber?' inquired Ben, huskily.

Joe looked 'sort o' cunning,' as Ben said when telling the story to his wife long afterwards; he opened his lips to speak, but closed them again.

'I'll tell 'ee what I knows when I'm safe in one o' the waggons,' was his reply.

Ben stood silent, leaning on his musket. This was the hour for which he had waited these many years, and though his revenge would cost him dear, he could not bring himself to forego it.

After a short struggle he said slowly, 'Years ago I swore I'd be even with you afore I died, Joe Goddin. I've bin kept alive all this while when men have been shot down to right an' left o' me: you've bin given into my hand, so to speak, an' I won't go back from my oath—no! not even for the sake o' what I hungers an' thirsts to hear. I won't kill 'ee, 'cause you've fought the French alongside me. I'll leave 'ee here, to rot beside the road, as many a better man nor you has rotted.'

Swinging his musket to his shoulder, he limped away without a backward look.

* Fact.

That night Ben could not sleep. The meeting with his foster-brother had revived old memories. He saw again the quaint, crooked streets of Ashwell, the green meadows by the river, the great white church where he and Pleasant had prayed together. Long forgotten words to which his lips had been strangers these many years came back to his mind. As he lay in the mud, his feet to the bivouac fire, a petition he had often carelessly repeated in those far-away happy days stood out in letters of blood against the dreary heavens—'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' It beat in his brain and re-echoed from the wild mountains about, until, finding no peace, he rose and turned his face eastward. There, a few miles away, his enemy lay—maimed, helpless, abandoned, now shivering in the wintry air, now scorched by the fever of his wound, tasting the agony of slow oncoming death. Ledall's vengeance was complete. He should have been a happy man at that moment.

Yet the thought of the poor mutilated wretch distilling his life thus, drop by drop, brought him no exultation, only a sense of fear. He dared no longer resist the impulse which drew him back along the road of death. In a passion of eagerness lest he should be too late, he sped to the spot where Goddin lay. No word concerning Pleasant passed

between them until the ambulance was reached, when the wounded man opened his eyes.

'You let me lie there hours, curse you!' he snarled, 'but you shall have your payment. Pleasant Heber married Taylor the sexton the year after you were sent for a soldier.'

With a laugh of gratified spite he fell back on the straw of the waggon, which he exchanged a few days later for a grave in alien soil.

Bereft of the hopes he had cherished throughout his wanderings, Ben stumbled back to his comrades, who asked him what manner of friend his was whose life he held so dear.

'Yon was the man I hated above livin' soul upon God's earth,' he made answer. 'If he had been my friend I might ha' let him die: seein' he was my enemy I dursn't,' but they did not understand him, and one who hailed from Ashwell told the story there later as proof of Ben Ledall's 'foolishness.' To himself he said, 'Though she's married an' maybe has children at her knee, I could ha' sworn she was praying for me this night.'

Ben took his part in the battle of Corunna, and was among the band of war-worn, disease-stricken heroes who reached England. Within a few months he found himself in the Peninsula again, whence he fought his way to Waterloo, and purchased his discharge at the cost of both legs. Then

it was that, full of aches and pains which he had acquired in his travels, maimed, scarred, hoary before his time, he turned his thoughts wistfully to Ashwell and—Pleasant's children.

The bells were pealing and a crowd had gathered about the office of the stage-coach when he arrived.

'What's up to-day then?' he asked.

'Why, you be come back,' was the reply; 'a private chaise brought the news as you were on the coach. Not many o' our lads has come back after eighteen years o' soldiering *and* the battle o' Waterloo! So we're bound to make a fuss, you see.'

Ben turned aside his head to hide the tears that trickled down his cheeks. He had gone away in shame and disgrace: he had returned crowned with glory and honour, 'for doing,' as he said, 'no more nor what thousands o' brave fellows have done.'

After feasting him, the townsfolk escorted him to one of the almshouses by the river. Among all the friendly faces which had greeted him that day he had sought in vain for one. Pleasant had given him no welcome, and his heart was heavy amid the rejoicings. He was sitting in his little room, pondering over her absence, when he heard the tap of a stick on the flagged path outside. It was a woman—no heavy-footed man—who was feeling

her way to his door. The cluster of boys that hung awestruck about the threshold, gazing with wide-eyed wonder at the soldier who had lost both legs helping to beat Boney, parted to disclose a slight figure and a pale face, at sight of which his vision grew dim.

'Pleasant,' he said hoarsely, 'I didn't think you'd be the last to welcome your old friend, for all you be married an' may be has children grown.'

A faint colour crept into her cheeks. 'Married?' she repeated, 'what d'ee mean, Ben? I'm Pleasant Heber still.'

Ben gave a bitter cry. 'He lied! Joe Goddin lied! I might ha' known he'd best me even when he was a-dying! He's cheated us out o' all these years, for I might ha' took my discharge after Corunna!'

'Maybe 'twas best as 'twas,' was her meek reply, and she was silent, while his eager look searched her face. Though her eyes still shone with the old mildness, something was missing from them. A chill struck to his heart: 'Pleasant,' he whispered, 'what is it?'

'I'm blind, my dear,' her calm tones replied. 'I haven't seen the sun these ten years. 'Twas the fine needlework that done it, an'—an'—maybe frettin'.'

In the silence that followed the boys slipped

away. 'Ah,' said Ben, presently, 'I was right that night after the fight at Villafranca, you were prayin' for me—oh, my dear, we can thank God that 'tisn't too late to be happy.'

Thus Ben Ledall and Pleasant came at last unto the haven where they would be. Seeing that they possessed—as he was fond of remarking—a pair of good legs and a pair of good eyes between them, they managed their household concerns with conspicuous success. I have already told how she tended the children, while he took in plain sewing.

Every year when spring came round Pleasant would push her husband along the roads to the woods, and kneeling among the blossoms would name each flower from its scent. The old folks who remember the pair say that they would go out of their way to meet Ben and his blind wife returning from one of these expeditions. The chair would be heaped with primroses, blue-bells and windflowers, and Pleasant would be listening, a smile of content on her face, while the battered old soldier trolled forth his favourite tune:

> At home, abroad, in peace, in war,
> Thy God shall thee defend:
> Conduct thee through life's pilgrimage
> Safe to thy journey's end.

CHAPTER V

THE VILLAGE A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Ben Ledall's story was, I fear, a not uncommon one in the last days of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth centuries. The overseers' books of these Vale villages give an unconsciously graphic picture of the distress then prevalent among the labouring classes, who reaped small benefit from the golden stream pouring into their employers' pockets from corn at famine prices. Overseers' accounts do not seem to promise an interesting field for research; under the present cut-and-dried system of relief the dictionary would probably afford light reading by contrast. Before the old Poor Law was abolished, however, the parchment-bound volumes were an epitome of village life. Tragedy and comedy are shadowed forth in their yellow pages, while the transcriber's ingenious spelling furnishes an inexhaustible fund of amusement. The cost of many of the necessaries of life, of every article of masculine and feminine attire, are found there; the fluctuations of the farming industry are incidentally revealed, together

THE ROAD TO THE WOODS.

NEARING HIS JOURNEY'S END.

with the price of labour, skilled and unskilled. All this, and much more, is recorded by a clerk whose conscientious handling of details fills the reader with respectful admiration. No item is too trifling for his patient pen to note, and 'Honney and vinnigar for Freeman's coff,' and 'Buttens, 2*d.*,' are duly entered for the justices' inspection and approval.

His orthography, as will be seen, is bound by no conventional methods; he wanders at will through the alphabet, and if a word does not satisfy his sense of fitness spelt after one fashion, he is always ready to try another.

The most abiding impression conveyed by a study of these old books is that of the patriarchal relations then existing between those who gave and those who received assistance. The overseers were essentially the poor man's guardians, exercising over him a more than paternal care. They paid the midwife for bringing him into the world; to a large extent they fed and clothed him during his lifetime; if he took a wife to himself, they defrayed a part of the wedding expenses; they allowed him money and medicine when he was 'laying steel,' as the clerk expresses it—in other words, when through some ailment he was unable to work; they tended him during his last illness, and after laying out his corpse they buried it in

wool and regaled the coffin-bearers with 'bred, cheese, and bear.'

The entries from 1782 to 1817 in one particular ledger are full of interest not untinged with romance. They deal solely with local affairs, only faint echoes being caught of the tremendous events which, during those years, were shaking thrones and changing empires. Yet these echoes serve to show that the remotest hamlet could not hope in that time of storm and stress to sleep unmoved in its lot.

At the beginning of the period the little agricultural village which contained but three hundred inhabitants was in a fairly prosperous state. Work was plentiful, rates were low. Gradually, as the war-cloud thickened, the sum paid yearly in relief rose from 120*l.* to more than treble that amount. In 1794 it jumped at a bound to 554*l.*, and within the following eight years another 100*l.* was added. Thus at the dawn of the last century, relief was being granted to the poor of this parish at the rate of rather more than 2*l.* per head, and doubtless there were many other places in similar case.

It must not be forgotten that the farmers who dispensed so liberally to the starving peasants were coining money through the labour of these same peasants. Corn was worth well nigh its weight in gold. In the year 1791 a significant entry

occurs : ' Begunn the bred this day.' A list follows giving the names of those parishioners to whom loaves were distributed, together with the cost each week, the total for the half-year amounting to 154*l.* Fearful apparently of the effect this heavy outlay, which did not include relief in clothes or money, would have upon the ratepayers' tempers, the overseers changed their methods. They bought flour, for which they paid the amazing price of from 86*s.* to 90*s.* a sack, barm and salt, the latter at a guinea a bushel. ' Faggits and furze ' to heat the oven, and the necessary implements, were added, and to the village baker was entrusted the task of making and baking the ' Poor's Bread.' This plan, cumbersome though it was, appears to have been less expensive than the other, for it was continued throughout the most distressful period. Occasionally some of the precious food went astray. ' Five loves lost,' notes the clerk in a mournful aside. Occasionally the number ran short, and ' John Lord ' received 2*s.* 3*d.* in lieu of a loaf.

Some parishes ' let out ' their poor at a fixed sum per head. In a copy of a local paper for 1796 I have seen an advertisement under the title ' Poors to Lett,' that ran, ' Any Persons willing to contract with the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the parish of —— in the

County of ——, for the Maintenance, Cloathing and Employment of the Poor of the said parish for one year, to commence from the 29th day of September next, are desired to send in their proposals, sealed up, to a Vestry to be held at the Red Lion on Thursday the 14th instant.' Let us hope the 'Poors' did not suffer overmuch from this system of farming out.

The doles of clothing consisted chiefly of 'Dowlas,' a coarse linen cloth; 'Clered Irish,' otherwise ordinary linen; 'Welsh hose,' 'round frocks,' and smocks. I have said that no item is too trifling for the clerk's attention. 'Paid for needles and tape for Lady Lovegrove's gownd, 2*d.*,' is set down with laborious conscientiousness. 'Lady,' it must be explained, was the Christian name of an inveterate beggar, and the transcriber who possessed a sly sense of humour amused himself by such entries as: 'For a per of hose for my Lady, 1*s.* 4*d.*' 'For my Lady's midwife, 2*s.*'

Numbers of girls were provided with an outfit for domestic service. In one instance 'Bed, boulster, shete and two blankets' were purchased for 'Farmer Webb's servant garl,' the total cost, including thread and 'macking,' amounting to 3*l.* 8*s.* 3¼*d.* Spinning-wheels were often given—the men spun hemp—and 'two hemp wheels, one

for George Tubb, one for Calib Stallerd,' are entered at 4*s.* 6*d.* each. Those with which the women spun flax were more expensive, 7*s.* being the usual price.

In turning the pages of the ledger one insensibly becomes interested in the fate of certain individuals whose names continually appear. One poor boy who met with an accident when, according to the baptismal register, he was but nine years old, mulcted the parish of a small fortune in 'Wooden Leggs,' apart from moneys expended on his clothing and food. Being a growing lad, his artificial limb had to be constantly renewed to keep pace with its flesh-and-blood companion. He was of sickly habit, and was several times sent for six months at a stretch to the Infirmary of a neighbouring county, to which the parish contributed an annual subscription of two guineas. Before his departure he was fitted out from head to foot in new clothes: 'Brieches for Jacob Castle, 5*s.* One shoe, 4*s.* A peer of hose, 9*d.* Westcote and jackut, 7*s.* 6*d.*' The only raiment he ever seems to have provided for himself was his headgear. He was frequently receiving money 'wenn ill,' or 'lying steel,' and on one occasion the authorities presented him with the munificent gift of 'a foul-weather cote, 15*s.*' Notwithstanding his poor health, he married, as indeed he could very well

afford to do under the circumstances, and before long his son also figured in the accounts. The last entry concerning him is 'Jacob Castle—no whoark but on roads,' and so the hapless creature passes into obscurity.

Another figure which arrests attention is that of Frances Norgrove. The overseers equipped her for domestic service, whence she returned, with a damaged character, to cast herself and her child wholly on their goodwill. The loss of her reputation, however, proved no bar to matrimony. Some years later she was married by licence—a most unusual proceeding in her rank of life—to a man from another county, who must have possessed some means, though he was not sufficiently educated to sign his name in the register. The parish of course had a hand in the matter, and the record sets forth: 'The expenses of Frances Norgrove's wedin and to have hur to her (new) parish: For cloke, 5*s*. For apporn (apron), 1*s*. 6*d*. For bonet, 2*s*. 6*d*. For one pear of shoes, 1*s*. 10*d*.' There was also a bill for board and lodging 'To F. Blunsden for Frances been in his house, 11*l*. 4*s*. 3*d*.' It can be imagined how cheerfully the overseers would defray the expenses of a ceremony that would shift such a burden from their own to other shoulders.

Here are some quaint funeral costs: 'For

Thomas Champ's wife's burial' (she had apparently come by her death in some untoward manner): 'Paid to twelve jurymen, 8*s*. For cofin, 8*s*. For three quarters of a pound of wool, 1*s*. 8*d*. Laiying out and after servis, 2*s*. 6*d*. Paid the Clarke, 2*s*. For four men to car hur to church, 2*s*.'

'After servis' puzzled me exceedingly. It figures also as 'after David,' and 'after Davis,' and represents the transcriber's attempts to compass affidavit!

The 'billet' system was in force at this time, and a resolution passed at a Vestry gives some idea of the power the farmers wielded over those dependent on them for bread. 'At a Vestry held this day, it is agreed that the labourers who want work do go round on the billet, every man in proportion to what he rents, until another Vestry be held, and that no labourer on the billet shall have more than 8*d*. a day, and not that unless they yarn it!' 'Billet-men' applied for work to the ratepayers after first procuring from the overseers an order for work upon a certain person, whom they were bound to inform the previous night. The 'billiter children' received the extravagant sum of 8*d*. per week for board and lodging, which seems strangely at variance with the generosity displayed in other ways.

As the distress among agricultural labourers

increased, so crime increased also. An item, which for long was Greek to me, made its first appearance as 'Goall Money.' After figuring as 'goal,' 'goyl,' and 'goil,' it slipped in by accident as 'Jail Money,' only to revert to its favourite form of 'Goyl.' It represented the quota paid by the parish towards the upkeep of the county prison, and during the period mentioned it swelled from a few shillings to 14*l.*

Another ever increasing source of expense was the Militia. It does not, of course, occur in the Accounts until 1794, when the Militia Bill was passed. Our struggle with revolutionary France was then in its infancy, and a substitute could be procured for 3*l.* or thereabouts. The village, being loth to part with her sons, was constrained to 'higher Souldiers' who commanded at first a much smaller premium than did their brothers-in-arms afloat—the 'hior of a seaman' costing the extravagant sum of 12*l.* 4*s.* 4*d.* But as the conflict dragged on its seemingly endless length the value of substitutes rose to 9*l.*, 10*l.*, 12*l.*, and even 14*l.*, and still the parish paid. Beyond the last amount she would not go, and several of the poorer labourers were enrolled in the 'Loco Militia' to take their chance of being eventually drafted into the line and sent off to stain Spanish soil with their blood. The married men com-

mitted their wives to the overseers' care. That the latter were deserving of the trust is proved by such entries as, 'Paid House's wife while he was in the Militia, 13*s*.' 'Paid Norgrove's wife's rent and fuel and 12*s*., while he was in the Militia.'

A village friend, who, like the shepherd mentioned in my first chapter, is a nonagenarian, if indeed he has not attained his hundredth year, filled in the picture given by the overseers' books with vivid personal touches of his own experiences. When last we met I do not know which was the more to be envied, Denis the talker or his listener. Probably the former, for if retrospection be one of the pains of middle-life and old age it is certainly one of its pleasures. Healthy-minded youth feels little temptation to halt and look back. The rosy peaks of the future beckon to him from afar. Not until the heights are scaled and are found to have borrowed their colours from the morning sun does the traveller turn and survey the tract through which he has passed, only to find that on it, now, the shifting glory lies.

And so when aged lips repeat 'Lord, keep my memory green,' the prayer means not so much that he who prays may be held in fresh remembrance after death, as that while he lives he may preserve the store he has accumulated during his pilgrimage. Such store is a rich possession—one,

moreover, that suffers no depletion by being shared with others.

Denis is not niggardly in this respect. His fund of curious information is at the disposal of every patient listener. He is a handsome old man, crowned with the snows of age. Time that has bleached his hair has dealt gently with his face, which shows few lines and wears an expression of singular sweetness. Except that his sight was somewhat failing, and that he was 'raythe hard of hearing,' he suffered little, until comparatively recently, from the weight of his ninety odd years. His deafness, I may add, made him utter his thoughts aloud, sometimes, as during Divine Service, with startling effect. He is now bedridden; less than three years ago, however, he was in perfect health, his bodily organs were sound; his legs alone refused to do their duty as of old. 'If 'twern't for they,' he used to say, 'I should be as good a man as ever I was.' Notwithstanding this reprehensible conduct on their part, he managed to walk short distances, to cultivate his garden, and to fill the office of Churchwarden, which he had held for more than fifty years.

He long kept the village shop, where he carried on a considerable trade; but competitors sprang up, his customers drifted to the neighbouring towns, he was unable to recover debts amounting

to a heavy total, and his business came to a standstill. Since that time he has found a home with a relative whom he befriended in more prosperous days. He was born somewhere about the year 1808 or 1809, during that extraordinary epoch which, by reason of the convulsions attending its birth and the swift rush of the fiery meteor that lit the heavens from end to end ere its light was quenched at Waterloo, is invested with a glamour that seems but to deepen as the past recedes. Those were the days of the 'Petticoat harvest,' when the labourers exchanged their smocks for the King's uniform and their reaping-hooks for muskets, when the crops were garnered by women, and men were so scarce that children living in 'lone housen' exclaimed 'There's a man!' if a rare chance brought one their way.

Denis's father was drawn for the Militia, but being a farmer he procured exemption from the hated personal service at a cost of 50*l*. Several of his friends paid a similar sum, serving their country—like many others—by proxy, in a cheap manner, for money after all is the cheapest means of purchase at our command.

A labourer upon whom the lot fell, and who could not, with his scanty earnings, afford the luxury of a substitute, hit on a novel and ingenious method of hoodwinking the authorities. Before

starting for the town, where he was to be sworn in presence of the justices, he stuffed his pockets with wood shavings, which he thrust into his mouth while he waited outside the magistrates' room. When the oath was put to him, he 'spoke never a word, but chammed and chammed his shavings, pulling 'em out from between his teeth,' until the worthy gentlemen of the bench, believing that they had an imbecile before them, released him from military obligations and sent him home forthwith. And no doubt some other luckless youth was haled to the barracks in his stead.

Denis's recollections deal less with political events than with the daily life of the village. When a little lad he used to accompany his father, who was one of the parish overseers, to the distribution of relief. This took place in the church after Morning Service, and, human nature being weak, it is probable that the congregations were larger under this arrangement than they are now. Indeed the old man hinted as much to me.

The overseers' table, on which were ranged piles of silver and copper coins, was set in the belfry, where the paupers presented themselves to receive doles in the shape of money, or orders upon the village shop for boots, clothing, and other necessaries. Not only relief was distributed after Morning Prayer. Some of the farmers made a practice of paying their men outside the church

door at the same time, that they might thus ensure their attendance at Divine worship. Well might old Denis remark when he handed round the offertory bag, not so long ago, 'I've seen more people here nor there is this marning!' Ninety years since the men in smock-frocks and hob-nailed boots sat in the chancel, which was crowded with forms and movable seats. At the west end was the 'musicioners' gallery, where the orchestra, of which young Denis was a member, fiddled and fifed. Sternhold and Hopkins had given place to Tate and Brady, names that recall another patriarchal custom then prevalent in the village. It was considered correct for newly-married couples of respectable degree to attend church ceremonially on the first Sunday after their wedding. The clerk met them at the door (the whole congregation rising at their entrance), and conducted them to the front pew, where they sat, the cynosure of all eyes. The 128th Psalm was *de rigueur* on these occasions, and the emphasis with which the orchestra trilled and quavered when accompanying the third and fourth verses is said to have been a source of some embarrassment to bride and bridegroom.

His wife, like a fair fertile vine,
Her lovely fruit shall bring:
His children like young olive plants
About his table spring.

At that time Denis's church possessed no vestry ; the parson robed in the chancel within view of his flock. It was part of the clerk's duty to fetch the surplice from the parsonage, where it was airing, and to lay it ready for service across the rail of the reading-desk. One Sunday morning the clergyman was seen struggling with a white garment that presented an appearance such as never surplice had before. The sleeves were short—so was the garment !—the folds were scanty, and it absolutely refused to meet above the divine's portly figure. Examination showed that the clerk had laid hands upon an article of underclothing belonging to the vicar's cook that happened to be reposing on the back of a chair before the fire in the vicarage kitchen.

The principal weekly event in the village was the departure of the road-waggon for London, and its return. It was despatched, laden with passengers and country produce, by the one tradesman of the place who then carried on the business, which afterwards became Denis's. The latter, in the direct and vivid manner of an eye-witness, told how the waggon and its four huge horses used to start at five o'clock on a Sunday evening. 'It stood on the green outside the shop, and half the village 'ud be there to give 'un a send-off.' On the stroke of the hour the master

would come out with ' a girt roll o' one-pound notes under his arm ' which he handed to the waggoner to pay for the groceries, stuffs, and clothing that were to be brought back. The master himself used to ride to London on horseback, starting the following morning and arriving about the same time as the waggon. He would remain two days, selling and buying, and reach home again the end of the week. All Saturday evening, and up to the time of Morning Service on Sunday morning, the shop would be crowded with country folk, bartering eggs, butter, poultry, and rabbits for commodities from town. When the bells ceased, the place was cleared, the shutters were put up, and the owner, after arraying himself in his Sunday best, would stalk down the street, his great prayer-book under his arm, and enter the sacred building as the psalms were about to begin.

Month after month, year after year, the same programme was carried out, the only variation occurring one dark winter night when the master, returning home, was thrown from his horse on the confines of the village and dragged almost to his own door. Thenceforward, to prevent a repetition of the accident, he determined to ride without girths, and the high stone may still be seen outside the shop which he had placed there to enable him to mount into his girthless saddle.

The highway along which the cumbrous road-waggon crept, and the mail-coaches rattled, bringing news of victories that ended at Waterloo, is connected with the village by a lane, and where this joins the main road the toll-gate and toll-house used to stand. Denis told many tales of how he and his boy friends use to 'tarrify' the poor little old toll-keeper. One trick nearly ended in a tragedy. The lads, finding the key outside and the man within, turned it on him; they then inserted the stem of a long pipe into the keyhole, filled the bowl with tobacco, lit it, and blew the smoke into the one room the house contained. The window was not made to open, and the air of the tiny dwelling was soon exhausted. Not until the old man was half suffocated did the boys realise that their 'play' was dangerous, and they stopped but just in time to avert a catastrophe.

The funny little round toll-house and the gate have disappeared; the road-waggon and the mail-coach have been swept away by motor and train. But Denis still is left, a link with that past which seems so near us to-day, barely a century distant, and yet is separated by so wide a gulf of scientific achievement and social progress.

CHAPTER VI

THE MOATED GRANGE

A SHORT distance from the Ford of the Still Pool there lies among the fields, half screened by noble elms, a low, stucco house. Viewed from the front you would take it merely for a substantial, square-built farmhouse, of comparatively recent erection, to which the lofty trees surrounding it, the pond, where ducks dibble and dive, which almost washes its walls, the little bridge that gives access to the yard, above all the fine colour and curve of the roof, lend it a certain picturesqueness.

Should you have the good fortune to examine it from the back, you will find reason to revise your judgment. The building forms a quadrangle the third side of which is missing. The fine old chimney-stacks, beautiful fragments of timber-work mercifully spared by successive 'restorers,' and a long, low wing set with tiny casements of ancient date, and probably the servants' quarters, are all that is left of the original Tudor mansion. The avenue can still be seen in the meadow, three ponds show the course of the moat, but of the gate-

tower and drawbridge not a vestige remains. Inside, the houseplace, split into several rooms and one small chamber upstairs, is said to have formed part of the old Grange.

Its past glories now live only in tradition. Creeping patriarchs of the village tell how, 'When I wur a bwoy, eldery folk usted to say as 'twas called the House o' the Romans, maybe 'cause 'twur old an' they people wur purty oldish. 'My father, bless 'ee, reemembers when he'd got water all round 'un an' a Coort wi' a gate an' a dooer all over girt nails. In them days ther' wur a belfry wi' a tower an' holes fur cannon, an' a bridge what came up in the middle so's anybody who'd a mindt could pull 'un up by the chains.'

Tradition dies hard in the Vale, as the name the 'Romans' testifies. Some three hundred years ago the Grange acquired a somewhat unpleasant prominence among its Protestant neighbours. Within the walls of the ancient mansion was enacted a side-scene in the far-reaching tragedy of Mary Stuart's life which, begun under such fair auspices—the picture of the lovely child's first meeting with her boy-suitor, Francis, comes like a breath of pure air upon the tainted atmosphere of the Court of Henry II. and Catherine de Medicis—was destined to end on the scaffold.

During Elizabeth's reign the 'Romans' was

THE MOATED GRANGE.

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occupied by a family of consequence who owned several other manors in the district, and whose cognisance—a gate—may still be seen upon a house in Hean's Island. The Yates's clung to the ancient faith at a period when constancy meant fines and imprisonment, if not death or exile. In 1570 Pope Pius V. had promulgated his Bull of Excommunication against the English Queen which, by forbidding Catholics from swearing allegiance to her and releasing those who had already taken the oath, placed them in the equivocal position of having to choose between rendering obedience to their spiritual or to their temporal sovereign. Faithful to both they could not be.

Ten years after the issue of the Bill a mission, consisting of three laymen, seven priests and two Jesuit fathers, set out from Rome with the Pope's blessing to reconquer England for the Roman Church. The leaders of this forlorn crusade were Parsons, who was fated within a few months to become notorious no less for his skill in political intrigue than for his burning pamphlets, and Edmund Campion, noted throughout the Roman Catholic world for his deep piety, his scholarly attainments, and his gifts as a preacher. He seems also to have been a man of singularly attractive, lovable temper, while of his single-mindedness and desire to confine the mission

solely to matters spiritual there can be no question.

Walsingham, who was as well served by his spies as was William the Silent, being cognisant of all that passed within the Vatican, learnt of the Fathers' departure from Rome before they had quitted Italian soil. Their arrival in England created a profound sensation in Roman Catholic circles. Among those who heard the news of their coming was Mr. Yates, then lying imprisoned in London for conscience sake. During the last few years he and his wife had given a home to eight Bridgetine nuns, who, on Queen Mary's death, had sought refuge in Flanders. The disorder consequent on the war for religious freedom between the Flemings and Spaniards had forced them again to fly, and returning to England they found shelter at the Grange. Mr. Yates contrived to send a message to Father Campion, praying him if possible to visit the hamlet and administer consolation to these women and to his own distressed household. A year had elapsed since the landing of the mission; Parsons, its actual head, was already deep in plots against the Government; he and his companions were being closely watched, and but a short time before he had narrowly escaped capture. The Grange was a well-known resort of Catholics, and Campion, who was ready

enough to comply with Mr. Yates's request, had some difficulty in obtaining his colleague's consent. He eventually wrung from Parsons permission to spend a few hours there, coupled, however, with the command that he should remain one night only. He arrived late on the evening of Tuesday, July 11. The following morning he celebrated Mass and preached, and after dinner got away in safety. Scarcely had he ridden off when the house was beset by a number of Catholic gentry from the neighbourhood, who, having heard of his presence, were anxious to see and speak with him.

It is at this point that the irony of Campion's story begins. Fate played with him as ruthlessly as ever cat played with mouse, letting him apparently escape time after time, only to crush him at the last. The visitors' disappointment on finding he was gone was so great that one of the resident chaplains offered to ride after him and beg him to return. At a little inn outside Oxford he found the Father, surrounded by tutors and students of the University. Slight persuasion was needed to induce him to retrace his steps, and two days later he reappeared at the Grange. Meanwhile, the news of his former visit and probable return had reached the ears of one Eliot, a renegade who had stood his trial for murder. Thinking to curry favour with the Government, he procured

a warrant for Campion's arrest, and on the Sunday, when more than sixty persons were assembled in Mrs. Yates's house to hear the famous preacher, Eliot contrived to make one of the number in order to learn for a certainty of his victim's presence. Having assured himself on the point, he despatched a pursuivant to the nearest justice, ordering him to call out the *posse* and surround the Grange in the Queen's name.

Mass was over, the company were at dinner, when a watchman on the gate-turret gave the alarm. Campion and the two resident chaplains were thrust into a secret recess, constructed in the thickness of the wall, and scarcely had the door closed behind them, when the spy burst in. Guards were drawn round the premises; every room was searched; the walls in some places were broken down, but no trace of the fugitives was discovered. The *posse*, ill-pleased at such Sunday work, waxed sulky, murmuring that Eliot had no warrant for his action. Thereupon he drew it from his pocket, plainly asserting that lukewarmness was the cause of their failure. The hint sufficed. Fearing to be suspected of favouring the Papists, the magistrate re-entered the house and had it searched a second time. The priests, who during the interval had quitted their hiding-place, crept hastily back, and Mrs. Yates, hoping to

secure from intrusion the room which gave access to the bolt-hole, took up her quarters in it for the night.

Once more the Grange was ransacked from garret to cellar. Once more the quarry eluded the hunters. It was near midnight ere the examination ended. The sheriff's men were tired and hungry, and after being supplied with food, they fell asleep where they were.

No sooner was quiet restored than the nuns entreated their hostess to call Father Campion forth that they might enjoy further discourse with him, to which proposal Mrs. Yates consented. There is something revolting in the selfishness, the spiritual *intemperance* of these women!

While the wearied Father, who appears to have been incapable of denying a request, was preaching to the household, assembled in the mistress's chamber, one of his audience, overcome with fatigue, fell down. The noise brought the sentry on guard in the passage upon them. Once more the walls were sounded, once more the priests escaped. The tale becomes monotonous in its repetition. At daybreak the *posse* prepared to depart, Eliot raging at having missed the prize that he knew must be somewhere inside the building. When ascending the stairs, he passed his hand carelessly over a stretch of wall behind

which, as it happened, the priests were hidden, saying as he did so, 'We have not broken here.' A servant hearing him, grew white and stammered that enough walls had been broken. His agitation betrayed him. The partition was smashed in, and behind it the three were discovered lying side by side.

'No man can escape his Fate.' For Campion was reserved that which he so ardently desired. With every mark of ignominy he was conducted to London, where the Governor of the Tower had him confined in 'Little Ease,' and on four several occasions put to the torture. No sufferings could shake his constancy, or wring from him the names of his associates. Broken in mind and body, he was brought to trial for high treason—Elizabeth's ministers were too astute to make religious belief a ground of accusation—and was condemned to die according to the horrible rites the sentence then involved. His execution took place on a chill December morning. While the body was being quartered, a young Protestant looking on was splashed by a drop of Campion's blood. From that moment he felt himself drawn to the Roman Church. He abjured his former faith, became a Jesuit, and eventually he also suffered death as a traitor.

The Yates's were wool-staplers who turned their

money into land, and they owned much property in the neighbourhood. They do not appear to have been heavily mulcted in fines for their adherence to the old faith, but, on the contrary, to have risen in the world, since I find the death of a Sir Edmund Yates recorded in Stuart times, and eight years afterwards that of a Sir John. Many vague legends cluster round the 'Romans.' One tells that in former days it contained vast treasure, three waggon loads of which were carried off during the 'War.' By the war is meant the Great Rebellion that bit so deep into the people's imagination. '"Never mind, John," said the old lady to her husband when the sowldiers took 'un away, "they haven't got it all." An' sure anuff under the hearthstone was a bushel and a half of gold.' I quote from oral tradition handed on to me by an aged labourer, whose tale unfortunately consisted chiefly of omissions. On which side the 'Old Lady' and her husband were—on King's or Commonwealth's—he left to his listener's fancy. As, however, among the list of 'recusants,' who as Papists were compelled to register their names and the value of their real estate when swearing fidelity to George I., the name of John Yates appears, it is safe to conclude that, being Roman Catholics, they would stand by King Charles rather than by Cromwell. I shall show

later that the district was swarming with troopers of both armies during one period of the war, and Charles himself slept several nights at houses in adjacent villages.

According to another version, it was the Ayshcombes, not the Yates's, who were thus stripped. The former family owned the manor of the Ford of the Still Pool and founded the almshouses there.

Almost contiguous to their mansion is an ancient pigeon-house, and in it, so it is said, their plate and money were hidden at the approach of the Parliamentary forces. The secret, however, was discovered by one of Cromwell's troopers, and *one* load of valuables was carried off to fill Roundhead pockets. This story sounds the more probable, though mine is the more picturesque.

The Ayshcombes have died out. Yates's are still found in the neighbourhood, but their glory has departed. Their lands were too skittish for them to hold, and like so many of their friends they were thrown from their saddles.

Some time ago I unearthed a quaint guide-book to this part of the Vale. The writer concerned himself not a whit with the history of the villages; others had set down such unimportant details. To a subject that loomed large in the local estimation he gave due prominence.

'At the Ford of the Still Pool,' he said, 'was

born in the year 1724 that wonderful natural phenomenon, John Loder, commonly called the Great Boy, who at the early age of four years attained his full growth, being then upwards of five feet high and large in proportion. Before he was five years old, he was as strong as most men ever are, and could rise from the ground with an hundredweight, as many persons now living can testify. His father acquired a considerable fortune by exhibiting him to the public, and his sons are capital farmers to this day.'

If the words of the writer are to be taken literally that the Great Boy's full growth was but 'five feet and upwards' his early promise was poorly performed!

Some of his descendants are still living in the parish, and only recently another John Loder, probably his grandson, died in Hean's Island aged ninety odd years.

From the Grange the road runs westward over the ford, which nowadays is spanned by a stone bridge. On either side willows dip their branches in the dreaming water, lending it as recompense their soft green tint. Soundless and unhasting, the stream takes its way between meadows where cows, red and white, industriously feed, or chew the cud, rapt in bovine musings.

Running parallel to the course of the brook are the remains of irregular, scarped terraces, that carry back the mind to wilder days, when cattle-lifting was an honourable calling and the Ford a vulnerable spot. The furrows on the grassy surface—relics of old-time war and rapine—serve by contrast to intensify the impression of deep peace which the landscape conveys as you climb the little hollow from the water. All around, the country rolls away in one of those wide, open stretches that alternate so strangely here with masses of woodland. Level with your eye great sweeps of corn reflect the sweeps of cloud-flecked heavens above and darken to every breeze that rustles their slender stalks. I have seen along this road on the same day oats ranging through every shade that oats can show, from the grey-green of the young shoots to the vivid hue of the ripening ears, perfected in the red-gold of the mature grain that is only matched by the locks of some of our island children.

The view is beautiful beyond words—calm, quiet, steeped in that intense repose which centuries of immunity from war seem to impress upon the fields. Far away southward, the sky is bounded by the long line of the downs that yet can scarcely be called a line, so melting is their contour, so tender their modulations, so exquisite their curves.

'THE ROAD RUNS WESTWARD.'

THE MANORIAL MILL.

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At the foot of the slopes there seems to lie a thick belt of forest, but I who know and love every inch of the border-land between hills and vale can tell you that the trees which distance gathers into a continuous mass are broken, when seen close, into clumps around the villages. From time to time a giant elm lifts itself like Saul head and shoulders above its fellows. Or a solitary poplar shoots upward towards the sun.

In the near distance a ribbon of polled willows marks where a streamlet winds unmurmuring towards the river—there is but one within a hundred miles of London.

White against the hedgerows, shining ricks speak of fruition and plenty, and here and there a patriarch willow, left unpolled, tosses its hoar head in the wind. Northward, the cornfields are swallowed in a dark, motionless army of trees, before us they run up to where a second fringe of willows, denoting another water-course, loses itself in the glow of the western heavens. Against the sunset radiance, a church-tower and a homestead link the wide expanse with Eternity and Time. The road strikes level towards them, and where the stream bends to it on the one side and the churchyard presses it on the other, we enter the first Island of the Vale.

CHAPTER VII

CERDIC'S ISLAND

CERDIC'S Island, or the Island of the Fortress, as some call it, contains all the elements of a properly constituted, self-respecting ancient village. Manor, church and mill lie within a stone's throw of each other; while in the outer court, so to speak, are the franklin's homestead, the smithy and the churls' cottages.

Just above the mill the stream—which here is broad and full and, being a 'tributary,' is called by a name of its own instead of after some obscure hamlet—just above the mill, I say, this important waterway expands into a deep pool. Hither throughout the centuries the sheep for miles around have been brought to be washed before being driven to the great sheep-fair of the county. This is held in a village the salient characteristics of which are celebrated in the jingle:

> remote among the Wessex downs,
> Claims these distinctions o'er her sister towns;
> Far famed for sheep, though not for spinners,
> For sportsmen, doctors, publicans, and sinners.

Those persons who fail to recognise the description will understand its point when I explain that the village lies in the centre of a famous race-training district and that the main street consists largely of inns.

The sheep-washing trade is no longer what it used to be when hundreds were dipped in the pool at sixpence a score. Have you ever seen the operation? The children who love to watch the poor, frightened, patient animals being driven into the pen, separated one by one, and tumbled into the pool, can tell you how it is done.

'One man gets howldt o' the ship by one ear, an' another man gets howldt on 'un by t'other. Then you puts a long stick under he's hind legs, an hucks 'un over back'erds into the water. He dwun't keer about that!' While 'he' swims wildly round, one of the helpers combs his fleece with a kind of rake, after which he is permitted to scramble to dry land and make way for the next victim.

The pool is an attractive spot, even when it is not the centre of a bleating, woolly throng. The irregular outline of the old mill, the reflections of sky and cloud in the water, the vista beyond of meadows a-blaze with buttercups, or sleeping in the deep shade of the elms, draw me once and again from the dusty highway. There is a fascination

even about the slowness of the stream, which in its dignified serenity and reluctant pace might be an aged river whose work is done, rather than an infant brook just setting out to find the sea. It can never have been young—poor little Saxon 'water'! Like the great Volga that crawls so wearily its appointed course, it must have been born old. But then a chattering, dancing, light-hearted stream would have matched ill with Cerdic's Isle, which is a reposeful hamlet of whose existence you would not dream unless you set out of deliberate intent to find it. No great artery runs within its borders; miles of meadow-land divide it from the railway, and the occasional appearances of the doctor's motor seem an outrage on its rural peace.

The church, which lies under the shadow of the manor-house and is opposite the mill, would match the Saxon character of place and people had restorers—medieval no less than modern—held their hand. Their touch however has been laid heavy upon it, and the wonder grows that one small building should contain so many different styles of architecture. Two rare and precious legacies of the original structure have escaped spoliation. The south door is framed in a round arch enriched with cable moulding, and with grotesque crowned heads, half man, half beast,

that loll their tongues at you when you enter in a fashion neither dignified nor reverent. Some of the early church-builders, it must be confessed, appear to have been occasionally bent upon the gratification of their own uncouth sense of humour rather than upon the adornment of the House of God.

Inside the church, above the entrance to a crooked passage cut in the thickness of the wall and designed apparently for a squint, is a tympanum representing a rude figure clasping two griffins. It has probably strayed from its first resting-place and is claimed by some authorities to be late Saxon, by others to be early Norman. To whichever period it belongs, it unquestionably is very early, very curious and very rare. Need I add that it is not, strictly speaking, beautiful ?

The tiny church is interesting by reason of its variety. It was built in all likelihood under the ægis of a great Abbey, some nine miles away, that held the manor until the Suppression, when it fell to a certain Sir William Gorfyn. I have not been able to learn anything of this knight who found a charming manor-house ready to his use. The larger part of that which we see to-day is modern. At the end nearest the church, however, an ancient wing survives which for sheer fascination and romantic suggestiveness can be matched

by no other house I know—not even by the Norreys's beautiful buildings.

How may I describe this fragment of an early fourteenth-century mansion, that you may see it as I saw it with shafts of sunlight piercing the dimness? Of the four rooms that form the wing two are slightly below the level of the present ground floor. They are dark and low, for though they are pierced by what our people call 'church windows,' the ivy has grown over these at will during a couple of centuries, covering them with a thick green mantle which the eye cannot penetrate and through which the daylight hardly filters.

Huge upright timbers bearing mighty cross-beams support the floor of the room above; a carved stone chimney-hood protects the open hearth. In one corner stands a cider-press that well might have served the ancient house, so rudely is it fashioned, so bleached with age it is. From the larger apartment a rough door leads into one of narrower dimensions which communicates by a second exit with the churchyard. This smaller room is called the 'Priest's Chamber,' on what authority I cannot say. The inner door and the wall adjoining bear traces of fire. According to popular tradition, the monks were at some time 'smoked out of the building,' but when

or wherefore is not told. It is possible that at the suppression of the Abbey the inmates of the Manor, whether lay or clerical, were loth to quit their pleasant home, and that the King's commissioners adopted this method of hastening their departure.

Popular tradition also is responsible for the statement that there formerly existed a subterranean passage between this house and the 'Romans.' If so, it would not improbably issue from one of the lower rooms.

The upper apartments are gained by a corridor and through a low door. In passing beneath the stone archway you step back five centuries to find yourself in a spacious hall, one corner only being taken off for a tiny oratory, open to the rafters and pierced by three tall Gothic windows with foliated heads. Like those below, they are obscured with ivy, but less thickly, and through the lights of the easternmost waving trees are seen and green grass. The leaded panes are daubed in places with splashes of red, yellow and blue paint, the work of a latterday artist who made his studio here, and the touch of colour when the sunlight strikes the glass enhances the mysterious charm of this relic of the Age of Chivalry and brings to mind its ancient use. For the dim 'Solar' was built to catch the sun; its three windows look east, south and west, and

were their green wrapping stripped away the rays that now shine in bands through holes in the roof, or hardly force their way between the leaves, would pour a glorious flood into every chink and cranny.

The ivy, too, enters by the roof, and not there only, but through chinks in the walls which long ago would have given up the struggle to hold together had they not been of more than modern strength. It has twined itself about roof-tree, tie-beams, and struts, and throws out envious fingers towards the floor. Soon, if not checked, it will cover inside as well as out with its uniform mantle, and the 'Solar' will be transformed into a green arbour.

What manner of men and women, I wonder, gathered in this lordly 'bower' with its beautiful windows, its finely-carved fire-place and its splendid timber roof? Did shaven monks resort thither for warmth and gossip in their intervals of prayer and work? Or did the Abbey lease its manor of Cerdic's Isle to lay tenants? Only such courtly knights, mirrors of Chivalry, as peopled 'Gardenleigh' were worthy to gather for high converse in that sunny hall. Only such ladies as Dame Marland and Aubrey should have prayed within that tiny oratory—now so obscure that you need candle to find altar-window, aumbry

A WINDOW IN THE 'SOLAR.'

KENSINGTON
PUBLIC LIBRARIES

and piscina—for the safety of husband, lover and son 'advancing the Lyon' in Scotland or France. Only such as they should have watched from the recesses of the lofty windows for the first glint of steel casque, the first flutter of pennon as their homing knights rode joyously up from the Ford.

We can people the Manor in fancy alone; the historian is silent concerning the tenants of those early years. All that he tells us is, as I have already said, that in 1555 Henry VIII. gave it to Sir William Gorfyn, who, being a knight, was presumably valiant. Doubtless he followed the simple fashions of his time—fought, hunted, loved, married, and begat children, extracting from life all its wholesome sweetness as God means man to do, though we in this twentieth century seem to find that sweetness too wholesome to be sweet—let us hope because our ideals are higher.

During more recent times the manor was held by a member of Old Mary's family of whom nothing more interesting is related than that he blew off one arm and bound up the wound with the uninjured member.

Another tenant was in the habit of bestowing a sixpence at Christmas on every child in the place. His discrimination, however, did not keep pace with his benevolence, and naughty boys and girls after having received their coins would

scamper home, change their raiment, disfigure their faces, and thus disguised would join the tail of the procession and boldly present themselves for a second gift. The Vale people are a simple folk !

This kind old farmer, being anxious to ascertain the depth of a shaft that had opened under the chimney-hood of the Solar and ran down parallel with the chimney, determined to sacrifice his young son to his archæological zeal. Thrusting him into the orifice, he let him down like a plummet to sound the depth, which happily was not excessive. Before he was well out of sight 'Tommy' cried that he couldn't 'go no furder,' the hole was stopped, and his parent was reluctantly compelled to draw him up to the sweet light again. Whether 'Tommy' adhered to the strict truth on this occasion is a question. It is possible that the shaft was connected with the underground passage to the Grange, but of this there is no certainty.

Cerdic's manor has its tragedy—a modern one of a not uncommon type, yet none the less poignant on that account. More so perhaps, entailing, instead of one supreme moment such as is given to the most unheroic soul to achieve, a long-drawn sacrifice of love, patience and courage, all of which are found in rare quality within those secluded walls.

CHAPTER VIII

ART IN THE VILLAGE

Beyond the Manor the street bends towards the bridge where the teams come down to water, where the children play and the loitering youths suspend their slow interchange of remarks to watch the wandering artist at his work. Not many painters, I am glad to think, find their way to Cerdic's Island. My friend was busy there one day when a young carter leading his horses halted to watch the picture growing on the canvas. A while he stood silent, then smacking his thigh: 'I can plough, I can 'arrer, I can ree-up, I can mee-ow,' he burst out with an oath, 'but dang ma if I can do that. 'Tis a deal better,' regretfully, 'than 'ard work!'

The same artist had been engaged a short time before upon a more ambitious painting when again a rustic paused beside him. After examining the picture from a distance, he came to close quarters. The result failed to satisfy his æsthetic requirements, and turning to the artist he remarked solemnly: 'The nearer you gets the

'orrider it looks!' which I think, as a frank expression of opinion, would be difficult to surpass.

It will be perceived from these stories that Art writ large is not regarded as a serious profession in the village. Indeed truth compels me to confess that it differs from mercy in that both its quality and quantity are so finely strained as to leave one doubtful at times of its very existence. It presents in this respect a striking contrast to its distant relative 'Artfulness,' the study and practice of which have been brought to a high pitch of perfection among the ingenuous Wessex peasantry.

The average English workman displays small perception of what is termed taste, Nature appealing to him more surely than does her handmaiden. The modicum he possesses is usually expended on his flower garden, where, however, neatness is too often mistaken for beauty. The ploughman who drives a straight furrow day after day in things mental as well as material cannot be expected to realise that Nature though never disorderly is seldom 'neat.' Where can a field of buttercups be found all of the same height?

Indoors, his attempts to satisfy his æsthetic instincts result as a rule in wall papers of vulgar colouring and unlovely design; in cheap prints that produce on cultivated nerves the same kind

of effect as the squeak of a pencil drawn across a slate.

The people are 'dearly fond o' picturs,' and when setting up house generally manage to include one or two among their 'bits o' things.'

So long as they confine themselves to portraits of celebrities or of the unfortunate members of the Royal Family, crude, wooden, unflattering though these may be, their decorative efforts do not inflict any excessive amount of suffering.

When, more ambitious, they soar to fancy or to Biblical subjects treated in the blatant style of the cheap German pictorial industry, the result is startling. The Old Masters who depicted personages of Holy Writ clad in the Western fashions of the day, painted what they saw, but they saw deep into the heart of life. The modern popular artist who sits down to produce a representation of Jonah after his ejection by the whale, and clothes the prophet in a check suit of dittoes and a bowler hat none the worse for its late unusual experiences, is not only ignorant and profane, he lacks the saving grace of humour. His sole excuse is to be found in the fact that his wares find purchasers willing to pay fifteen shillings for the privilege of calling them their own; purchasers who exhibit them with as unquestioning a satisfaction as the art patron exhibits the Turner

that has cost him six thousand guineas. Picture-buying is not a pleasure confined exclusively to the rich !

Sometimes one meets with the reproduction of a good picture in a cottage. The admiration which a coloured print of the ' Angelus ' evoked—that, surely, should be certain of a sympathetic welcome among the poor—was genuine, if somewhat lacking in discrimination. ' That ther' was done by a Frenchman, they tells me, Miss,' said the house-mother. ' 'Tis a *pretty* pictur to my thinkin'. They calls it the " Hangelus," or summat sich, though whether that means the wheelbarrer or the baskut I dwunno.'

The artist who elects to ply his brush amid the publicity of the village street has not always a happy time. He quickly becomes the centre of a circle of critics who proffer advice and exchange remarks that, as I have already hinted, are sometimes more frank than flattering.

Another painter of my acquaintance—a lady this time—was advised if she wanted something to do, to ' paint our garden-seat, which as how it's got rather shabby ! ' She suffered many things of local critics who took great umbrage at her representation of the sunset-flush on the walls of a wattle-and-daub cottage. ' Lor, fancy makin' whitewash that colour ! ' cried these

precisians, unlike the old clerk who announced that 'A Meetin' will be held next Wednesday to consider what colour the church shall be whitewashed.'

The villagers are sticklers for truthfulness in Art if not in speech! The more photographically accurate the detail, the higher the picture ranks in their estimation. I once came upon a humble artist who was busy taking the portrait—in oils—of a 'villa residence' in the village. It was a triumph of fidelity to fact. The house was of brick; its hue, however, being too subdued to please the owner's fancy, he had had the end wall stained a brilliant crimson. A red-gravel path intersected the grass-plot which constituted the garden; at one side stood a shed painted a virulent shade of green which could not by any stretch of charity be said to harmonise with that of the grass and trees. The subject of the picture was sufficiently offensive to the eye even amid the softening influences of its surroundings; when transferred to canvas it was pathetic in its ugliness. The crude colour of the new bricks, the sunset-hues of the gable-end, the vivid tints of lawn and lean-to were faithfully reproduced without the faintest touch of shadow to mitigate their harshness and with a correctness that would have been invaluable in a pattern-copyist. But Wisdom

is justified of her children. The painting had a *succès fou*, being pronounced 'that nat'ral you med think 'twas the 'ouse itself.'

Odd flashes of knowledge, as bewildering as they are unexpected, occasionally break through the rustic's crust of ignorance, revealing glimpses of familiarity with things high and rare. Not long ago a working woman was showing some friends of mine over a manor-house—half Elizabethan, half Queen Anne—in one of the villages skirting the Vale. Panelled rooms, deep-splayed windows, bolt-hole and powder-closet had been duly admired; but, 'Wait a minnut,' said the caretaker, who had kept the best till last, 'there's a fine old Roman staircase for you!' throwing open a door and revealing a very ordinary flight of stairs leading to the attics.

This woman had married into the family that at one time had owned the manor and to-day are farm-labourers, earning twelve shillings a week. On being asked whether she was aware that the property had formerly belonged to her husband's people, she replied, 'That a never did then, for my 'usban's father never had nothen save what a yarned an' his pension'—he was an old soldier—'an' a mos'n gen'ly drank he as soon as he'd draewed 'un.' It was explained that not her father-in-law, but his ancestors, were meant, where-

upon, after a few moments' reflection she remarked, like little Lord Fauntleroy's friend, Mr. Hobbs, 'His aunt's sisters? I never knawed as he had any-!'

The villages use the terms 'Greek' and 'Roman' without attaching to them any definite idea beyond that of incalculable age. Some years ago a beautiful little fourteenth-century chapel was put up for auction in the village. It had belonged in pre-Reformation times to the Carthusian monks of Shene and latterly had been put to such profane uses as the storing of apples and potatoes. A would-be purchaser from a distance, wishing to glean some local tradition about the building, addressed himself to an old countryman who stood leaning on his stick, watching the auctioneer with an air of bovine interest. 'Well no, sir,' he said in answer to the gentleman's question, 'I dwunno as I can tell 'ee much about 'un, ceptin' as how I've a yeard say as he b'longed to the Grakes.'

This classic allusion reminds me of another, contained in a note to myself. An agriculturist who had had a 'college' education, and who by industry and shrewdness had risen in the world, called to see me, and learning that I was away from home, wrote to me thus: 'Dear Miss Hayden, I called to see you last evening, but finding you

were non est and minus for the night, I knew it was no use to wait.' Having once been minus, can one ever attain a plus quantity again? The question is not without interest from a personal point of view.

The same person it was who, when a stranger settled in the village and local curiosity burned respecting the new-comer's past, present and future, replied in answer to the question 'Is he an artist?' 'Oh no, he's quite respectable; he's a gentleman!'

One more story I will tell you before we leave the green near the bridge. It came to me stamped with the authority of a rural dean and caused another church dignitary acute anguish, I having unkindly related it when he happened to be suffering from an attack of lumbago. The clergyman through whom I heard the tale was paying a pastoral visit when he noticed on a cottage wall a coloured print representing the Blessed Virgin and St. Elizabeth in glory, with St. Joseph kneeling down below.

'I see you be a-lookin' at my pictur, sir,' said the housewife. 'I bought he at Mrs. Smith's sale t'other day. 'Twas this way, you see, sir. Our Marier's got a young man, an' he don't come on as fast as we could wish. When I sin this pictur, I sez to meself, "The very thing fur our

Marier's young man ! " You see, sir, there's they two young ladies a-sittin' dressed up sa fine, an' this young man a-kneelin' down below. He don't know which on 'em to have, so the pictur sez, " *Ave Marier* ! " '

This may be an ancient story—I will not guarantee its authenticity; it was told to me, however, as having happened to the clergyman, a rural dean in the Midlands, whose name I am not at liberty to give. If not true, it is *ben trovato.*

We have dawdled long enough beside the brook; let us take the winding road that calls itself the main street of Cerdic's Island. Close at hand is a charming cottage almost hidden from sight behind an enormous box-tree through which an archway has been cut to the front door. A couple as charming as their house live here. The wife, many years younger than her husband, is one of those women who contrive by some mysterious process to elude all stain of work, just as some people by a process equally mysterious contrive to attach to their persons every wandering particle of dirt. Shrewd, honest, industrious, wholesome in body and mind, she affords a living proof that the women of England are worthily carrying on the tradition bequeathed them.

Her husband comes of a good stock, as one might guess from his refined manners, his well-

cut features and bright blue eyes. He is an interesting talker, and I am indebted to him for much information respecting the village. One racy story he told me of his grandfather, who, disdaining stage-coach and road-waggon, walked with a friend to London. The two countrymen wore their smocks and tall hats, and I gathered that their appearance created some sensation in the streets, where they were subjected to an embarrassing amount of attention. On applying for lodging at an hotel, they were refused admittance, the host asserting that all his rooms were occupied. Thereupon, to console themselves, they ordered and paid for a bottle of 'black shap,' or port wine as we call it. The proceeding effected a revolution. The landlord became polite, waiters attentive, and by a strange chance a room unexpectedly became vacant which was placed at their disposal. So true is it to-day as two thousand years ago, that 'he who has no money'—or is believed to have none—'is counted neither good nor honourable!'

Opposite the box-tree cottage is another as attractive in its way, where if you are fortunate you may buy stone arrow-heads turned up by the plough in the adjoining fields. At this point the village takes a rest so to speak, resuming its course, after a wide interval of willow sprinkled

orchards, at a block of middle-aged houses. Beyond them is the smithy, presided over by a skilled craftsman who has won many prizes. 'If you want your horse well shod, take it to Cerdic's Island,' the country-folk say. I cannot omit the inscription on the creeper-covered house next door which symbolises both the archaic simplicity of the hamlet and its struggles after 'eddication.' The notice originally ran 'Aggonett let out on hire.' The baldness of the statement, however, evidently pained the literary instincts of someone in authority, for the missing letters have been added—below, since space did not permit of their being inserted in the right place—and it now reads thus: '$_{W}$Aggonett$_{e}$ let out on hire.'

A turn past a couple of inns, sitting cheek by jowl in apparent amity, brings us to the green, where the few dwellings retreat to stand at a respectful distance off the grass. In the centre is an ancient sun-dial raised on three steps of inconvenient height. The hollows which generations of children climbing up 'to see the time' have made in them, and in the pillar of the dial itself, set me thinking of other similar hollows worn in the side of a French dungeon by the feet of prisoners climbing up to see the sky. Opposite the barred window that gave not on the open air but on a staircase in the thickness of the wall,

the rude presentment of an altar had been scratched. It may be fancy, but a dim remembrance seems to come back to me of a dial scratched also on the spot where for a few minutes daily the blessed sunshine fell. Round that pathetic time-keeper would run no flattering legend—*Horas non numero nisi serenas*—which well might stand for the motto of the peaceful English village. Yet how may I dare to say that it did not better fit the prison-cell of those captive French priests, since for men who walk as seeing the Invisible all hours are serene; for them the fretting limitations of Time and Space exist no longer, material things are but shadows of a dream, and the Altar that registers the passage of Eternity is their only dial.

I put my feet into the children's marks, and not being of Rosalind's stature, I too climbed up to see the hour. The gnomon was still fixed to the plate. Time, however, as though in despite, had erased the figures that none should mark how he went forward to his end.

A modern guide-book sets down the dial as a cross, to the indignation of the villagers. 'He've allus bin a dial,' they exclaim, 'an' never nothen else. What should us want wi' a cross then?' Aye, what indeed? Have they not had the Cross in their midst for well nigh a thousand years,

as the stones of their own church can testify? But, fellow wanderer, if you would preserve some illusions in this age of disillusionment, forbear to ask how the lessons of the thousand years have been learnt among the Islands of the Vale. Nor in past days at least has the fault lain entirely with the pupils.

Beyond the green the village comes to an abrupt termination on what appears, because the surrounding country is so low, to be high ground. The flat land is everywhere ringed round with woods that fold about a nest of little settlements. One is the home of roses—fragrant, many-tinted, glorifying the village with their all-pervading exquisite presence. Another preserves in its corrupted nomenclature the memory of a powerful family who followed Duke William across the Channel, and one of whose barons helped to wring the Great Charter from King John.

In the church of a third you may muse beside the tomb of one of the most romantic figures that flitted across the stage of English history, whose sad fate touched the heart even of her husband's enemy, Henry VII.

Daughter of Earls, cousin of Kings, the Lady Catherine Gordon clung faithfully through good report and evil to the low-born adventurer, the Tournay boatman's son, to whom she had given

her hand. She married Perkin Warbeck, believing him to be Richard Plantagenet, second son of Edward IV., and rightful King of England. She lived to see him defeated, captured, branded as an impostor self-confessed, and finally hanged as a traitor. His fate involved that of nobler blood, for three days later the young Earl of Warwick—whose claim to the throne through his father, the Duke of Clarence, both Richard III. and Henry VII. recognised by keeping him in close confinement—ended his twenty-one years' imprisonment on the scaffold. He was but eight years old when his father's sins of treachery and intrigue were first visited on his head, and one would fain believe that the 'fierce and strong wave that devoured and swallowed' his life proved a kinder friend to him than man.

'The White Rose,' as Perkin Warbeck's widow was called at the English Court, survived him by some twenty-eight years. She took for her second husband no pseudo prince of the blood royal, but a plain country gentleman, lord of the manor in the remote village three miles or so from Cerdic's Island, on the southern slope of the low hills that bound the Vale to the north. Let us hope that she found at his side a surer happiness, a more lasting peace.

She sleeps in a nameless grave from which the

despoilers' hand has stripped heraldic bearings and inscription. Nevertheless,

Non le fia men dolce un po' di quiete,

after the stormy episode of her youth, on that account.

Her country home, with its beautiful, hoary manor-house, deep sunk in ancient shade, is worth a visit. In the church where her body rests is another tomb—that of the knightly builder. Above, he is shown mail-clad, in the full flower of his strength. Beneath, is his cadaver, wrapped in the shroud which does not conceal the horrid anatomy. The villagers, who miss the moral that the sharp contrast would point, believe the figures to be those of 'two men who were killed when helping to build the church.' They must entertain a poor opinion of the muscular powers of him who lies below.

They have their own legend, too, about the manor-house, which they declare is haunted by a lady. She 'walks' in the upper part of the building, carrying a baby in her arms. No one, that I could learn, has ever beheld her, yet—she 'walks.' In proof of the story they show in a secluded corner of the churchyard two graves —nameless, like the Lady Catherine Gordon's; one is of full size, the other pitifully small.

It is not for us to learn the tragedy which lies hidden beneath the kindly earth; the hopes and fears, the joys unrealised, the promise unfilled, perchance the sins repented of, which these mounds represent. Our way lies not towards the cold north, but into the setting sun through the glowing fields to the Green Island.

CHAPTER IX

THE FORTRESS AND THE GREEN ISLAND

From Cerdic's Island the high road runs almost due west. We will, however, let it take its course alone—which it does for the most part with or without our permission—while we turn off along a green track that threads the fields on our right. These grass ways are found in every corner of the county. When they forge straight ahead, people who know little of the matter ascribe them to the Romans; if they display a tendency towards curves, the same persons call them 'British,' the Anglo-Saxons apparently lacking initiative to strike out into new paths! Those who have studied the subject are usually silent, knowing full well that roads, like derivations, are apt to lead astray.

Our ancient way, whether British or Roman, is a way of pleasantness and peace, falling almost imperceptibly to the low ground, above which the island just contrives to lift its head.

When last I trod that road, green barley fringed with scarlet poppies and the sulphur of

the wild charlock waved on either side, and I being more like in stature, as already hinted, to Countess Olivia's 'youngest wren of nine' than to Rosalind, had much ado in places to see over the nodding ears. Before me the ground sloped to a shallow depression enclosed by trees, some of which had got astray from the rest and stood about in clumps; here two or three elms held their heads disdainfully above the world, there a group of silver birches whispered together, their graceful attenuated foliage that showed the blue sky between rustling in agitated fashion as they swayed towards one another.

In the centre of the hollow was that which I was seeking—the earthwork that gives the island one of its two names. Recognisable at first glance, with something of menace clinging to them still, the scarped terraces rose massive, square-shouldered from the surrounding cornfields. The camp lay inside a triangle of water-ways, one at least of which might have been cut by the Romans, so straight from west to east did it run. The second came from the north, through a thick growth of elder-bushes in fragrant flower, of briars showing pink blossoms, of huge, twisted hornbeams, and of hawthorns out of bloom, but heavy with berries in readiness for the approaching winter. Scattered throughout the thicket were

ashes, willows, aspens, oaks, but never one of my favourite beeches, which nowadays I seldom see. The green road leads almost to the foot of the camp ere, turning abruptly to the right beside another beautiful cluster of birches, it makes for the Green Island. Thither will we presently follow it. First let us climb to the summit of the earthwork. Tall waving grasses grow over triple *vallum* and *fosse*. Bees hum among the purple thyme, and 'ladies' slipper' and rock-cistus give back to the sun the gold he has given them. Time, the busy-body, has done his best to fill up the ditch and level the *valla* on the northern and western faces; on the southern side they are well defined and lift the 'castle' sharply above the levels. I had been told that its shape 'was a perfect circle,' and its appearance, to the unscientific eye, corresponds with this description. The guide-book, however, declares it to be oval or egg-shaped. The history of the county further asserts that the lines of entrenchment can be followed only on the north-western side. I do not ask you to believe either the history or myself; visit the 'castle,' see it with your own eyes, and—believe half you see!

The same history refuses to commit itself as to the origin of the earthwork. An earlier authority is less cautious. The author of the old book from which I quoted the story of the Great Boy (he was

an organist in the little country-town near, and published his guide in 1756) rushes in where the compilers of the modern work fear to tread. 'This castle,' he says, 'is said to have been the castle of King Canutus the Dane. Its form indisputably denotes it to have been a Danish encampment.'

With due respect to Mr. Stone, the organist, the camp is more likely to be of British than of Danish origin, as is testified by its name alone, respecting which an authority on place-names, of whom it may with truth be said 'that what he knows not' on the subject 'is not knowledge,' has admitted that 'it seems to contain the Welsh "Caer," a fortress.' Whether British, Roman, or Danish, the camp that forms one of a chain thrown up to protect the lowlands is an altogether delightful spot on a summer morning. The interior, when I saw it, wore a mantle of green barley, softer and more richly shaded than velvet and embroidered round the hem in scarlet and gold. And what a view it gave me from its northern crest! Close at hand the woods came down on either side, then drew away to right and left, leaving clear a wide space that ran up to the foot of the far-away hills—the hills that I love.

Every heart has its waste water-butt, into which it pours the affection that brims over. Some people

keep the waste for their friends, reserving the main supply for themselves and their dog. Others reverse the process. I, having no pet dog to absorb my superfluity, bestow it on the hills which yield me tenfold that they receive. It is to them when they are within my vision that my eyes involuntarily turn, as friend turns to friend that he may read what is written on the face beloved.

They spoke to me that morning through the blueness of the intervening distance with the same changeful yet unchanging voice. Across their slopes—many coloured with the warm tone of the bare earth, the bright green of unripe corn, the yellow of mustard in bloom, and the russet of turf as old as themselves—streamed a vast host of clouds, their ragged fringes trailing like skirmishers on the flanks of an army. They were in headlong retreat, but the dreary experience of the summer, so-called, warned me that they would presently return to avenge themselves on the sun.

As I watched them so must the makers of the camp have many a time watched their foes retreating, streaming away over the hills to return at a more convenient season.

Light-footed, skin-clad tribesmen that lurked in forest and swamp; stern Roman legionaries who came not once nor twice before they found more

than a foothold in the mysterious isles of the West; fierce warriors from the North beating, wave after wave, upon the white cliffs to creep farther each time up the strand—the mound on which I sat had seen them all and had marked how each race had played its part in the making of that small, barren, fog-encompassed Britain, who one day was to call her own a fifth part of the globe.

Later it had seen nobles and kings broken by the power of sword and purse. And now it watches the rise of the people, perhaps to behold them also broken in their turn, since every instrument that is perverted from its lawful use to become an instrument of tyranny works thereby its own destruction. On the people alone depends the continuance of their rule—on whether they use their power to their own ends, or as a sacred trust for the whole good of the Commonwealth.

No gift of prophecy is needed to foretell the last and greatest change that 'King Canutus' castle' will behold. Surely it will be the reign of universal peace, when idle spear and shield are high uphung, when the trumpet speaks no longer to the armed throng. The last and greatest, because so long as man covets what he has not, so long will work be found for trumpet and spear.

Yet faith and reason forbid us to doubt that in the time appointed the Kingdoms of this world

'I NUMBER ONLY THE HOURS THAT ARE SERENE.'

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will fulfil their destiny in the universal Brotherhood that knows neither kingdom, nation, nor people.

It is a pleasant, shady road, soft to the tread that leads from the camp to the Green Island. This, I ought to say, is not its proper name, but it is prettier and more descriptive than that of the hypothetical British chieftain, who perhaps, few subjects being more dangerous to dogmatize about than the etymology of place names, gave the islet its nomenclature.

The village might have been set down in a forest clearing. Trees of every size and kind surround it, so that it is not easy to find, nor when found are you sure of the fact. So small it is, that even at the heart and centre of it you wonder where it hides.

The church conceals itself behind a huge acacia, the parsonage behind a stone wall in whose warm shelter fine flowers are set, but neither thin nor sparingly, because the border contains no fruit trees that they might deceive.

The Great House, of which a glimpse is caught when crossing on the threshold of the hamlet, a lovely woodland glade all white and fragrant with 'meadowsweet,' retires within the seclusion of its park. Only some dozen cottages look out upon the world, which just there is charming enough to furnish them ample excuse.

A strip of grass, close-cut, a tiny stream, the bleached trunk of a once mighty elm propped in its old age by stakes wreathed with crimson rambler roses, the deep shade of the woods beyond —such is the prospect that tempted the cottages to step out of doors, so to speak, and gaze about them.

The history of the settlement centres round that of the Great House and of the family who have owned the manor-lands since the time, it is said, of 'King Canutus the Dane.' They hold them by 'Cornage,' by tenure, that is, of a Horn, which, they affirm, was presented by him to the first of their blood who emerged from the crowd. They claim, further, that the original horn is still in their possession. No one, however, save the owners, in these doubting days, would dare to credit this assertion, and following the guide-book I will content myself with remarking that 'its age is uncertain.'

What is certain is that an ancient horn exists, if not quite as old as supposed, and that it served its purpose shrewdly during the reign of Charles II., when one of the family proved his claim to the estate by its production.

Land in this parish would appear to have been cheap, for the records tell us that one Alice held some part of the Green Island of Edward III. by

service of repeating five paternosters a day for the souls of his forefathers, an easy method of fulfilling one's feudal obligations. Even less onerous was the tenure of a small holding in a neighbouring county where a red rose was presented in lieu of service or relief. By comparison with this the personal service of holding the King's head when he was seasick must have induced, if not a sense of injury, at least the reflection that His Majesty was asking a high price for his bit of land !

The Great House was built by a fashionable architect during the latter years of George II. At the same date the church was rebuilt in the pseudo renaissance style then prevalent, and at the expense of the reigning member of the family, whose tomb sets forth this pious act, together with an account of his many virtues. The inscription somehow failed to move me, though the beautiful statue above it, of the dead man's wife, who predeceased him, leaves scope for romantic imaginings.

Far more haunting than this elaborate monument is a little square stone tablet let into the outer wall of the chancel. ' William White,' the record runs, ' God that Sent Him Into the World, May 21, 1651, Said May 10, 1655, Returne Thou Son of Sorie Man. Psalm 90, v. 3.'

Infinitely touching are the brevity and restraint

of the simple epitaph in which the fatalism of the old Greeks is illuminated by the Christians' belief that that which God sent forth He would gather to Himself again.

One of the church-builder's successors two or three generations later is held in lively remembrance by the islanders. The story is still told of how, when the first Exhibition was held, 'Squire' sent the old men of his two villages to London for a treat, laying upon them but one condition, that they should all wear smocks. Those who did not possess one borrowed from their neighbours, and 'some o' the old fellows were sa fat they could scarce squeeze into 'em. They had to somehow, however, or bide a-twhum, an' none on 'em didn't want to do that 'cause they medn't never ha' the chanst o' gwine to Lunnon agen.'

Among the country folk who went up to see a later Exhibition was a man who was wont to complain bitterly of the weather 'we has nowadays. A usted to be purty fairish when I wur a bwoy, but since them ther' gen'elmen up in Lunnon ha' tek'n to sending on 'un out, you never knaws what you be gwine to have. Folks thinks 'em be a deal cleverer nor their Maker, but bless 'ee, they ben't!' On his return from town he was questioned as to his impressions. Shaking his head with a

mournful air, he replied, ' Ah, I did think as men wurn't sa clever as their Maker, but 'pon me sowl I begins to think they be cleverer ! '

A fellow villager of this man, finding himself in one of the busiest thoroughfares of London, took his station on the steps of a church that he happened to be passing.

' What are you doing ? ' inquired the town-bred friend who was showing him round.

' I be on'y a-waitin' to let the folks goo by,' was his answer.

The smock frock is seldom seen now off the stage. The only one with which I am personally acquainted made its last public appearance on ' Pretoria Day,' when it figured in a parade of farm waggoners with their teams. Its use on that occasion was purely pictorial. The old man who owned it and who wore it until the day of his death, had passed away, and the smock was preserved as a picturesque relic that was in frequent demand at village entertainments for ' character songs.'

Grampy Flowers, the former possessor, was a gentle old fellow who some years before his death was the hero of an adventure that might have been tragic, but only succeeded in affording the village food for laughter and his daughter-in-law much occasion for stitchery.

The incident happened during a severe winter

when the rivers and streams were fast bound in an icy chain, when for long weeks the earth was iron, the heavens lead. Grampy Flowers' world, as he came home from work one afternoon, was neutral-tinted ; the only touch of colour to be discerned in the dull, grey land was a faint pink line behind the western woods. As evening drew on this line grew and deepened, flushing the sullen sky with crimson and purple hues, and throwing over the desolate fields a golden glory, against which the leafless twigs were silhouetted in delicate outline. The children pouring out of school stood for a moment dazzled by the glow of the sunset—for a moment only ; other, more urgent, affairs demanded their attention.

Under the bank lay the smudged remnant of a once white snowdrift, and the girls who had worked out the problem before knew that boys + snow = x, which stands for an unknown quantity of the second term down one's neck, in one's face, everywhere, in short, where it should not be. Big sisters laid hold of little sisters and fled 'down street,' pursued by missiles and derisive jeers from the enemy, who then directed their energies to dealing out death and destruction among themselves and the luckless passers-by.

'Drat them bwoys,' said old Flowers, as a snowball broke with a swish on his hat.

'Hooray! I hit Grampy Flowers!' cried one of the imps, 'let's gie 'un another.'

'Tell 'ee what! I'll gie you a taste o' my stick if you comes anighst ma,' and Willum shook it angrily. The threat seemed to produce some effect, and he was allowed to enter his garden unmolested. He was about to open the door of the cottage when he was again struck on the head. This time, instead of a swish there was a thud. The old man reeled with the force of the blow and stumbled forward into the room where a woman was sitting by the fire, a child on her lap.

'Hello, Gramp,' she said, looking up in surprise. 'What's the matter wi' that you comes in head fust like a blind pig?'

'One o' they young devils put a stwun in his snawball an' hit I on the yead. Meks I fell dazed an' silly-like. 'Udn't I just about leather 'un if sa be I cotched 'un! How's the chile, Annie?' glancing at his little granddaughter.

'The doctor's bin this arternoon an' he sez, "Mrs. Flowers," sez he, "there ain't no reason why she shouldn't get well; 'tis on'y weakness; she wants rousin'." On'y weakness. An' she a-wasting till she's naught but skin an' bone! How be I to rouse her, I'd like to knaw? Speak to her, Gramp. See if she'll tek notice on 'ee.'

He took the tiny fingers gently in his palm,

hardened with years of labour. 'Milly, year's Grampy come 'ome. Wun't 'ee gie 'un a kiss? Open your purty eyes an' spake to 'un, my dear.'

The glimmer of a smile dawned on the little white face, the heavy lids flickered, but the child seemed too weary to lift them. Not many weeks ago she had been running about, filling the house with sunshine by her quaint sayings and pretty ways. She had caught the fashionable complaint, however, 'the hinfooenzy,' and since then her small stock of strength had diminished daily. Her grandfather, who adored her, made up his mind from the first that she would not recover. 'I allus knawed she wurn't long fur this wurruld,' he would say, with the resigned fatalism of his class. 'No doctor wun't do she no good, though I've a-yeard 'um be sa ter'ble clever in Lunnon, they can do most things 'cept raise the dead. Folks tells ma that if arraone wanted a noo nose they Lunnon chaps 'ud cut a good 'un off a dead man 'an clap he on your own face. Ay, an' 'twud grow ther' too, same a-sif twur your own!'

Miraculous powers such as these were, however, beyond the reach of humble people like his son and daughter-in-law, who must needs be content with an occasional visit from the hard-worked parish doctor. It is in time of sickness that the sting of poverty is felt; when the heart is wrung by the

sight of a precious life ebbing away for lack of the skill and the luxuries that money alone can purchase.

'Ah, she be struck fur death!' sighed Willum, as he gathered Milly's frail form in his arms. 'An she'll goo straight to Heaven, blessed lamb; there's no sin b'longin' to she.'

'An' if sa be as she has to goo, 'tis better fur her to be took while she's young, afoor she be confirmated an' has to answer for herself.'

'So 'tis,' and the old man relapsed into silence, while his daughter-in-law busied herself with preparations for supper.

'Measter's gin I the sack,' he remarked presently, 'telled ma in the field as he shouldn't want ma arter nex' wik.'

Mrs. Flowers paused in the act of lifting the kettle from the hob. 'Did a now! An' what'll 'ee do?'

''Ply fur reelief, a 'spose—two shillin' an' two loaves. Measter sez he'll mebbe find ma summat in the spring—how do he think I be to live betwix' whiles I wunners! The farmers 'ud like to trate we like taters simly; pit we, when they ha'n't got no need on us, an' dig we up when 'um have.'

'They noo clo'es be come,' said the woman, giving a lighter turn to the conversation. 'Thee'd

best wear 'um termorrer, fur the old 'uns is as thin as paper—not fit fur this weather.'

A whole new suit was a rare luxury with old Willum, and the first putting on a proportionately solemn occasion. His waking thought next morning was of the clean, warm clothes, but his pride and joy in them were somewhat dashed by the remembrance that this would probably be the last he would be able to afford, now that he was turned off.

'They be fine an' large,' he murmured, as he drew on his nether garments, which reached almost to his armpits, buttoned the 'weskit,' and slipped his arms into the jacket. He might with reason congratulate himself on possessing some thick garments, for the cold was intense. Only yesterday fowls had been found dead on their perches, while a carter bringing home his team had dropped by the roadside, struck down by the terrible frost, and the horses had found their way back to their stables alone.

Willum had his breakfast, lighted his pipe, and stumped upstairs for a farewell look at his grandchild. She lay so still that at first he thought she was dead, but when he spoke she smiled and stretched out her arms.

'Do 'ee want a kiss from Gramp, then, the purty dear?' Taking his pipe from his mouth he

stooped and kissed the waxen cheek. 'Bless her, she's a sight better this marnin',' he said to himself as he creaked down again to the kitchen and opened the front door.

Outside everything was covered with rime. Roofs, trees and fields shone ghostly white in the dimness. The first streaks of dawn were showing in the east, and overhead the stars were withdrawing one by one into the recesses of the sky.

Save for the lights that gleamed in some of the cottage windows there was no sign of life about the village when Willum trudged through it on his way to work, the men-folk being already astir in farmyard or field. The wind was biting, yet the old fellow felt it not; indeed he was conscious only of a glow of warmth, which he attributed to his new suit. 'Never had nairn like this afoor,' he said with a chuckle, rubbing his sleeve against his face to feel the quality of the corduroy. ''Tis fur all the wurruld a-sif I wur settin' in front o' Annie's fire.'

Beside the ricks on the moorland road a group of labourers awaited him, it being his business to cut the hay which they would carry to the yard where sheep and cows slept snug.

'Willum be latish,' remarked one, slapping his arms across his chest.

''Ere a comes wi' a lantern,' said another.

'No, ten't a lantern neether. Blowed if a ben't all a-fire!'

'Hi, Willum, Willum, dost know as thee bist a-fire? Thy stummick's all a-burnin'!'

Grampy gave the speakers a look of quiet scorn. 'Thee cassn't mek a fool o' I, lads. I be warm, bee-u-tiful an' warm, which as how I wun't deeny it. But 'tis all along o' my noo clo'es, these year corduroys. Lemme get at the rick,' and he would have mounted the ladder had they not stopped him.

'Dost want to set the 'ay a-fire as well as thy owld carkiss? Look fur theeself, gaffer, if thee wun't belave we!'

Thus adjured, he condescended to bestow a cursory glance at his waistcoat; the sight he beheld filled him with astonishment and dismay. A large hole in the region of his 'lower chest' disfigured his new clothes—a hole the red edges of which were spreading in an ever-widening circle. He turned a helpless, piteous eye upon the group of men.

'I on'y put 'um on this marnin', and they be spiled a'ready!'

'Didn't thee feel thee wast a-burnin'?' inquired one.

'No, I never! I thowt I wur warm an' comfer'ble like, but I laid it to my noo things. It

must ha' bin my pipe as done't. What wi' Milly bein' bad, an' measter giein' ma the sack, an' they young prodigals o' bwoys a-hittin' I on the yead wi' a stwun in the snawball 'issterday, I feels that 'mazed an' confounded I dwunno what I be about. 'Tis more'n like anuff as I put my pipe in my pockut afoor she wur douted.'

The men smothered the creeping fire to the best of their ability, and one of them led old Willum home, committing him to his daughter-in-law's care. She put him to bed, despatched a messenger for the doctor, and then sat down to indite an epistle to the parson's wife. This last proceeding cost her no small amount of thought, for she was shaky as to the spelling of one or two words. When it was finished, she regarded it with an air of triumph, remarking complacently as she fastened the envelope, 'Lor, what a blessin' I be sa handy wi' my pen!' The note ran: 'Onnered Madam, beggin' your parding but i astes You if you can give Me a little Hile for my usbands farther Which as how he as burnt His stummick Bad. Your Obedt. servint A. Flowers.'

The story of the old man's adventure quickly spread through the village, and Mrs. Flowers held a large but informal reception of her friends, who numbered myself among them, at which the clothes were exhibited amid a chorus of ejaculations and

comments. 'Loor'-a-mussy me, to think o' that beau-ti-ful suit a-ruinated like that ther'! Jackut an' weskit, an' trousies an' shirt wi' a girt 'ole in 'em as you med stick your head through!'

'An' he a-burnin', an' niver knawed it! 'Tis a comacal job—the comaclest as iver I heerd tell on. Blesh you, ther's a place on his pore stummick as big as the palm o' me 'and.'

'Doctor sez as he wun't niver get over't. What wi' the shock to his instertootion an' the burn—at his age too. Well, well, 'tis a fine caddle fur his daughter-law, to be sure.'

The latter on hearing the doctor's opinion went straight to the cot beside the kitchen fire, and carrying little Milly upstairs she laid her in the big bed beside her grandfather. 'For,' said she, 'they're dearly fond o' one another, an if sa be as 'tis the Lord's will to take 'em, mebbe they'd like to die in comp'ny.'

When, however, the child fully grasped that she was in 'Grampy's bed along o' he,' she smiled serenely, and stroking his rugged face murmured, 'I'se better now,' after which spirited performance she fell into a sleep from which she awoke with the beginnings of what developed into a promising appetite.

Willum, perceiving that she had made up her mind to get well, thought he could do no less,

and for several years afterwards, should you have happened to pass through the village on a warm sunny morning, you might have seen a white-haired old man, mild of feature, bent of form, leading a little girl by the hand. Should you have inquired their names, you would have been told that 'Yon's little Milly Flowers'—who is little no longer—'wi' her Gramp, what set hisself a-fire an' niver knawed it.'

CHAPTER X

THE FORD OF THE HEATH

Between the Green Island and Cerdic's Isle there lies, flung across the gold of the cornfields, a ribbon of woodland—soft, green and dusky. The heart of it is threaded by a glade, on either side of which silver birches, some straight as warriors, others bending to the ground as though to kiss the grass before lifting their plumy crests to the sky, range themselves in order meet to form an avenue.

By all the laws of poetry and romance so fair a glade should lead to Titania's bower, or to the grot where the Belle Dame sans Merci kissed the life blood from her thralls. Wessex, however, defies such laws; the mossy track leads to the haunt of neither fiend nor fairy, but to a spot the loveliness of which merits a sweeter, less ludicrously inappropriate appellation than that of 'Bedlam,' by which it is known among the country folk. It is, I am told, a corruption of 'Bethlehem,' which last, it has been suggested, was given by the Puritans who changed many of the place-names in the county to others more in

harmony with the austere temper of their mind. A mile or so from beautiful Bedlam, beyond the spinney of Scotch firs whose red boles and blue-green branches repay the sun for his efforts to pierce their serried ranks, the village of the Ford of the Heath—otherwise Heatta's, otherwise Hat Ford—stands up between its two 'rivers.' Its inhabitants are in no manner of doubt respecting the derivation of this name. 'Hundreds o' years agoo, afoor my grandfather's time an' mebbe afoor his father, ther' wur a girt battle fought hereabouts betwix' King Alfurd an' them Danes (they come acrass the water 'ee knaw, and wanted to tek this year countree from we). King Alfurd, he got the better o' they and just about punished 'um! When he an' his sowldiers wur a-marching home, they stopped 'ere fur a drink—ther' wurn't no publics much in them days a s'pose, an' fightin's ter'ble thirsty work 'um sez. Seein' they'd narra a mug nor a glass between 'um, they lapped up the water in their hats, an' that's how it come to be called Hat Ford.' Thus runs the legend in the vulgar tongue.

The mention of King Alfred, who is our local hero, reminds me of what should have been told in a previous chapter; that about the middle of last century a noble Earl wrote an ingenious pamphlet proving, to his own satisfaction if to that of no

one else, that King Canutus' Castle near Cerdic's Island was the identical Danish camp into which Alfred penetrated disguised as a minstrel. This theory is even more picturesque than that which attributes the earthwork to Canute. The pity that we cannot accept both !

The Ford of the Heath touches to the eastward the Green Island ; westward it runs up to the parish of the Stony Ford. Though it is a heath no longer, old men fifty years ago remembered when a great part of the land was waste ground covered with furze ; the gravelly soil and the name 'the Down' that clings to one corner go to show what it may once have been.

The village is small, consisting of a few cottages, a 'shop' and an inn that grew up around the manor. This was held during the reign of Henry III. by a knight, Sir Robert, who called himself after the place. Later, it passed to Thomas Chaucer, whose relationship to Geoffrey has formed a subject of controversy for nearly four centuries. Speght in his life of the poet says : 'Some hold the opinion that Thomas was not the son of Geoffrey, but some kinsman. But the pedigree by the hands of Master Glover alias Somerset, as also the report of the Chronicles, show it to be otherwise.' Many authorities, ancient and modern, differ from Speght both as regards his

'A FEW COTTAGES.'

reasons and the conclusion he draws from them. Professor Skeat, however, in his 'Introduction to the Student's Chaucer,' appears to have come to the same opinion by a different road. 'As Thomas Chaucer was a man of great wealth and of some mark,' he says, 'we should have expected to find early and undoubted evidence as to his parentage. We find, however, that Thomas Gascoigne, who wrote a Theological Dictionary and died in 1458, refers to the poet in these words: "Fuit idem Chawserus pater Thomae Chaucerus, armigeri, qui Thomas sepelitur in Nuhelm iuxta Oxoniam." Gascoigne was in a position to know the truth, since he was Chancellor of Oxford and Thomas Chaucer had held the manor of Ewelme, at no great distance, till his death in 1434.'

Village tradition holds, along with Speght, with Professor Skeat and James Gairdner, that Geoffrey was the father of Thomas, the lord of the manor, who was High Sheriff of two counties and warden of Wallingford Castle. He took to wife the heiress of the Burghershe family whom Richard II. 'gave him in marriage,' and through her, perhaps, he obtained his property in the Ford of the Heath. His only daughter and heiress, Alice, married William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, who was defeated and captured by the Maid of Orleans at Jargeau in 1429. He subsequently negotiated

the marriage between Henry VI. and Margaret of Anjou, was raised to ducal honours, and as head of the Queen's party virtually ruled England.

His unpopularity with the Commons brought about his impeachment, and the King, hoping thereby to save his life, consented to banish him for five years. But the Commons were in no mind to be thus baulked of their victim. Suffolk's movements were watched. He took ship at Ipswich, intending to make Calais, and three days later was overhauled by a large vessel whose captain summoned him to surrender as a traitor.

The Paston Letters—in one written by William Lorrimer to Sir John Paston—contain a vivid description of the final act in the tragedy. The Duke 'was then arraigned in the ship upon the impeachments and found guilty. And in the sight of all his men he was drawn out of the great ship into the boat, and there was an axe and a stock, and one of the lewdest of the ship bade him lay down his head and he should be fairly dealt with and die on a sword; and took a rusty sword and smote off his head within a half a dozen strokes, and took away his gown of russet and his doublet of velvet mailed, and laid his body on the sands of Dover; and some say his head was set on a pole by it.'

The de la Poles were born under an evil star,

against which they fought in vain. They were descended from 'William Poole of Hull, a worshipfull man, growne by fortune of the world,' and by lending large sums of money at good interest to Edward III. for his French wars. Michael, the first Earl, was a favourite of Richard II., to whom he owed his advancement. But the King's favour proved too frail a barrier to withstand the jealousy of the nobles who, headed by Richard's uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, procured a bill of impeachment against the minister. More happy than his master, he succeeded in escaping to France, where he died.

Michael's son fell a victim to disease in Henry V.'s camp before Harfleur. His grandson, Duke William, as we have seen, was brutally executed as a traitor to the Realm. John, the second Duke, married Elizabeth of York, Edward IV.'s elder sister, who bore him three sons. Of these not one died in his nest, misfortune pursuing the race to the bitter end. John the eldest, whom Richard III. had designated as his successor, joined Lambert Simnel's desperate enterprise and was slain at Stoke. Edmund was beheaded in 1513, after having suffered imprisonment for seven years. His crime consisted in the fact that he stood nearer to the throne than Henry VII., who had lured him back from the

Continent, whither he had fled for safety, by a promise that his life should be spared. For his oath's sake the usurper refrained from putting him to death, bequeathing him, as David did Shimei, to the wisdom of his successor.

The youngest and last of the de la Poles took service with Francis I. of France and lost his life at Pavia, where his master lost 'all save honour.' Upon Edmund's death the manor of the Ford of the Heath fell to the Crown and was bestowed by Henry VIII. upon Sir Alexander Unton, of Wadley Hall in the adjoining parish. This family, an ancient and honourable one, still continued to link the village with makers of history. In the tiny church the marriage of Sir Alexander's son, Edward, with the widowed Countess of Warwick took place.

Plots and counter-plots, wars and insurrections, scaffolds running blood, are the associations which the name of Anne Seymour evokes. Her father, the Duke of Somerset, was Queen Jane Seymour's brother, and as Protector of the Realm during Edward VI.'s reign he made more enemies than friends. At the head of the faction resolved to compass his ruin stood the powerful Earl of Warwick, whom Somerset vainly tried to propitiate by giving his daughter Anne in marriage to the Earl's eldest son, Lord Lisle. The wedding

was solemnised at Shene in June 1550, and the young King, who was present, entered in his diary an account of the festivities that marked the occasion. After a 'faire diner and some dansing' Edward and the ladies 'went into tow chambers mad of bowis' where they saw 'six gentlemen of one side and six of another run the course of the fild twis over.' The gentlemen then 'fought at tournay. After souper the company' came in their barges to Westminster where was more jousting and the 'mascers ran foure courses apece.'

Ere six months had passed, the bride's father was beheaded within the Tower at the instigation of her father-in-law. Truly in those days a woman's foes were those of her own household!

Fate was not slow in avenging Somerset. Mary's accession involved the downfall of the ambitious Warwick, who meanwhile had been created Duke of Northumberland, his son becoming Earl of Warwick. Within three years and three months of the Protector's death, his implacable enemy, that enemy's fourth son, Lord Guilford Dudley, and his daughter-in-law, Lady Jane Grey, perished on the scaffold. His eldest son, Anne Seymour's husband, was released from the Tower to die within ten days. Some historians affirm that he died in captivity before the order for his release arrived.

The Countess of Warwick had been a widow six months when she became Mr. Unton's wife. Thankful must she have been to quit the blood-stained precincts of Mary's Court and to put off her dearly purchased greatness. Briefly in the register the simple entry runs. 'Mr. Edward Umpton, Esquire, and the Ladie Anne, Countess of Warwick, were married in the parish church of Hatford the third callends of May, in the first and seconde yeare of ye raignes of Phillip and Mary.'

Anne's later history is sad. She bore her husband no children, and about the year 1566 she began to show symptoms of insanity, her mind having perhaps been unhinged by the accumulated sorrows of her youth. Her attacks of madness continued with lucid intervals until her husband's death in 1583, when between that event and his funeral a commission sat at Burford to inquire into the state of her mind. The date of her death is unknown, nor can I say whether she was present at Wadley when Sir Edward entertained Queen Elizabeth. There was much feasting and merriment on this occasion and the host presented to her Majesty a beautiful jewel garnished with 'dyamondes rubyes and fyve perles.'

Sir Edward was succeeded by his brother,

whom the Queen twice sent as her ambassador to Henry IV., King of France and Navarre. Sir Henry Unton won his spurs before Zutphen, where his friend, Sir Philip Sydney, 'that verie parfit gentil knight,' won the love of all gentle souls for all time to come by his gift of a cup of cold water.

In the autumn of 1591 Sir Henry was before Rouen, which the French King, who just then was holding on to his crown with both hands lest the League should pluck it from his brow, was besieging. The correspondence that passed between the ambassador and his sovereign shows her to have been neither an easy mistress nor a complacent ally, and the two Henrys may well have wished, as men under authority have wished in later days, that communication were more difficult and posts less frequent.

Elizabeth, through the Lord Treasurer, writes sharply to her envoy asking why the French King has not paid the English soldiers she had sent to his help. She has to be pacified with the assurance that he has no money wherewith to pay his own—barely enough, indeed, for his personal expenses. Another grievance against King Henry is set forth in the letters. In November of the same year Unton informs Burghley that 'the King hath made three gentlemen knyghtes that have

accompanied me this journey—Sir Christopher Lytcott, Sir Thomas Chaloner, and Sir Denrax Poole, which he sayd he would doe to show his love to me and for want of profitt to bestowe honour. Yet it was his pleasure soe to have ytt, which neyther I nor they could well refuse.'

Queen Bess did not share her ambassador's views on this point, and 'Will. Burghley' the following month replies: 'To the right honourable, my verie loving friend, Sir Henry Unton. The Queen, after I had closed uppe my letter, reneweth her former mislikinge that the French King hath made some of your Companie Knyghtes—she willeth that he shall in no wise suffer anie to be made Knyghtes that are her naturall subjects, because she will make choice of the worthiest and them make Knyghtes herselfe.'

Another letter from Sir Henry contains more grateful intelligence. 'Our myners' had arrived at the camp and 'they doe more work,' he writes, 'in twoe houres than the Frenche in two daies, who did not understand their worke before the English came.'

Notwithstanding the clever English sappers, the siege of Rouen proved interminable. Sir Henry wearied to return home and implored the Queen to recall him both on account of his health—he was suffering from ague, which is the cause of his

'ragged writinge'—and for reasons of his 'private estate.' At length the coveted permission arrived and he bade farewell to the French King, who meanwhile had abandoned Rouen and had moved to St. Denis 'with all his Counsell and his army, intendinge to make a forte upon the river of Marne to brydle Paris.'

The ambassador's expenses 'For returninge home to the Corte, June 1592,' amount to 81*l.* 10*s.* 'For transportation from Diep to Dover of myselfe and twenty-twoe servants, 20*l.* For transportation of my stuffe, horses, and 16 servants from Diep to London 50*l.* For 23 post horses from Dover to London, 11*l.* 10*s.*' He does not appear to have charged the Queen for his food on the journey, doubtless considering that abroad or at home he must eat.

Heavy items in his expenditure are 'For sending of letters to King Henry and to her Majestie the Queen 40*l.*' and 'For espialls and intelligences, 200*l.*'

Sir Henry returned to France and died at Paris in 1596, his body being brought back for burial in his parish church, where the tombs of himself and Dame Dorothy his wife may be seen. The inventory of the contents of Wadley House that was taken at his death enables us to furnish from garret to cellar the country house of a sixteenth

century gentleman. The bedrooms of the 'Coke,' the butler, porter, gardener, and the several other men-servants who slept indoors, gave the scribe little trouble seeing that for the most part they contained nothing beyond the bed with occasionally a chest or a stool. 'My Lady's Chamber' was more elaborately furnished, though even that would not meet our modern ideas of comfort. 'A windowe cussyn of grene velvet, twoe chaires, two little grene stooles, one paire of dogges in the chimney' constituted the furniture above and beyond the 'Fielde bedstede' that was surmounted by eight plumes of feathers, was covered with 'grene cloth laid with watchet (blue) lace' and was hung with 'five curteyns of grene cloth' to match. The bedding consisted of 'one fether-bed, one fether bolster, two blankettes, one grene rugge coverlet, one liverye coverlet, one cloth of Dornex thereon.' 'Dornex' was a stuff used for carpets and curtains that was originally manufactured at Dorneck, namely Tournay, whence it found its way to Norwich. The contents of this room were valued at 12*l.* In Sir Henry's study were seven hangings of gilded leather, one table, 'three daxte shelves with many bookes of diverse sortes to the number of 220, and one cheste of virre,' the total value being 22*l.*

'Daxte' and 'virre' are puzzling; it has been suggested that the former may mean desk-shelves, while the latter possibly stands for fir-wood.

The contents of the parlour included a 'liverye cubberd' (the term 'liverye' being applied, as the editor of the inventory suggests, to several things of the same kind made in the same pattern), three green carpets, two green chairs, a black velvet chair laid with gold and silver lace, three red satin cushions laid with the same, thirteen green cloth stools—green was evidently the colour of the house—a field or fald stool, one cushion of Turkey work, one other cushion, one 'paire of billows and one paire of tonges.'

The contents of the 'wet' and 'drye' larders are too numerous to give; those of the chapel are significant as showing how completely it had been stripped of its sacred adjuncts. 'A littel paire of stockes,' some old chests and settles take the place of benches, altar and pulpit.

The manor-house at the Ford of the Heath was enlarged and embellished during the Untons' reign. Though Sir Edward, who was married in the church adjoining, did not occupy it, his brother, Sir Henry, may perhaps have brought his wife Dorothy Wroughton here. It is a square-built substantial mansion with the oldest wing running at right angles to the rest. Standing among

beautiful trees, it catches the eye of the traveller on the distant high road by reason of its blue-grey look of age. From the south and west fronts it commands a lovely view over the Vale and up to the Downs that bend round at this point so that the deep shadows filling the hollows in the flanks of the Great Hill can clearly be discerned. Along the sunny terrace poor Lady Anne in brocaded petticoat, ruff and coif, may have paced with her comely sister-in-law, or wandered through the pleasance to the stream and watched the travellers crossing the ford near by on their way to the Green Island.

In the spacious flagged and panelled hall Dame Dorothy, whose cheerful face is sculptured above her tomb, may have sat spinning among her maidens, while wandering pedlars told of Drake's exploits in the Spanish seas; in the wainscotted parlour she may have entertained her husband's guests, the Yates's of the Moated Grange, the Fettiplaces whom we shall meet presently in Hean's Island, the Southbies of Carswell, the Knollys's of the Stony Ford, and other county gentry. We know from the Wadley inventories how the room was likely to be furnished.

The splendid Jacobean staircase was not yet constructed, but the bed-chambers entered through low, narrow doors would be much the

same then as now, save for their modern windows; the great kitchens, too, would have seen little change. In one of their huge chimneys the present occupier declares he could hide so that men would seek him for a month without success. Other curious recesses the old house contains where arms—or, at a pinch, a man—might be concealed.

Local tradition asserts that Thomas Chaucer resided at the manor; of a fifteenth century house, however, little if any trace survives. The most ancient part overlooks the old churchyard; from the windows on that side you may drop a stone almost into the ruined church itself. I say the 'ruined' church, because some thirty odd years ago that which had served from Norman times was abandoned, and another at the opposite end of the village was built to do its work. The edifice in which Edward Unton and the Lady Anne plighted their troth is to-day for the most part roofless. An ugly mausoleum, fashioned by some fantastic whim on the designer's part in the likeness of an ancient Egyptian temple, blocks the nave, which is open to the sky. Ivy wreathes the windows, from which the glass has disappeared; Virginia creeper throws its flaming tendrils above the Norman doorway. Only the chancel remains intact—a deserted sanctuary, stripped of its adjuncts, haunted by the ghosts of the centuries.

Let us make our way through the shady churchyard where tall grasses wave and briars clamber at will among the tombs—a garden of death—and turn the unwilling key in the narrow door. Within the morning sunlight shows, almost on the jamb, a consecration cross as though to remind us that our feet stand upon holy ground.

Striking athwart the dimness of the chancel the sun's rays fall on a tomb set lowly on the floor beneath a rough-hewn arch in the northern wall. The stone slab supports the full-length effigy of a man clad in a woollen gown like that which in the Occleve portrait the great Chaucer wears. The sleeper's feet rest against a hound, between his clasped hands he holds a heart. His head is bare, his features, worn by time, are clear-cut still, and express refinement and marked individuality. The whole, though rude, is instinct with feeling. Whose is this nameless sepulchre, from which the Ages have erased lettering and heraldic device, that is wrapped about with mystery and silence which the desolation of the ruined fane heightens indescribably ?

Some say it is the tomb of a priest—an unfrocked cleric, if so, who shows neither tonsure nor ecclesiastical habit. Others affirm it is that of Sir Robert de Hatford, the founder, which can hardly be, since Sir Robert died and was buried

THE GARDEN OF DEATH.

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a century before the effigy was carved or the arch cut in the chancel wall.

Once again I invoke local tradition to repeat the story concerning the monument that it has told for the last four hundred years. No warrior knight, no shaveling monk, it declares, rests, till the last trumpet's peal bids him rise, beneath the effigy-weighted slab, but the mortal remains of the father of English poetry himself, 'Dan Chaucer,' in woollen gown, unbelted and unarmed, whom Thomas, his son, caused to be buried in the church adjoining his manor-house. Local tradition, you will retort, lies in this instance as in so many others, since all the world knows that Chaucer sleeps in Westminster Abbey. Let me correct that statement. What all the world knows is that 'according to the best authorities' he sleeps there, the fact itself being disputed as well as the exact spot where his body was laid. The vicinity of his supposed grave was marked in Caxton's time by no better monument than a leaden plate, 'honginge on a pylere whereon was wreton his epitaphyre, maad by one Surigonius, Poet Laureate of Milan.' Beside it, says Leland, the printer set up a white stone, inscribed with a Latin elegy to his famous countryman. Thus, within eighty years of the poet's death, the exact site of his grave was not generally known, the only warrant

for the belief that his bones rested within the Abbey being a vague tradition and an insignificant sign placed in St. Benedict's chapel by a foreign admirer.

In 1555, according to Anthony à Wood, Nicolas Brigham—who 'exercised his muse much in poetry and took great delight in the works of Jeffrey Chaucer—removed his bones into the fourth cross ile or transept of St. Peter's Church, Westminster, and erected over them a comely monument with Chaucer's effigies and an epitaph in prose and verse which to this day remains against the eastern wall of the said Isle.' I cannot recollect what authority Wood, who wrote in 1691, nearly a hundred and thirty years after the event he chronicles, and nearly three hundred after Chaucer's death, gives for this statement as to the removal of the body. That within fifty years after the date when he alleged it took place a country gentleman living near Hatford claimed the village as Chaucer's burial place I will proceed to show.

In 1866 a Mr. Adin Williams, now deceased, who resided on the western border of the Vale, wrote to a local paper a letter dealing with this subject, a copy of which lies before me. 'We can hardly think,' he says, 'that Thomas Chaucer, a man of wealth and station, would allow his father to rest in an unmarked grave. By the esprit of

the times he must have given him a monument. Then where is it? Where so likely as in the church of his own manor? In spite of the wear and tear of five hundred years, I cannot help thinking that the old Hatford monument is very like in features' (and, except for the cap, identical in costume with) 'the Occleve portrait of Chaucer. For many years the collection of old black-letter books has been my passion and pursuit. In a rare folio Chaucer of 1561 I found some time ago a quaintly-written manuscript note referring to "Maister Southbie of Carswell," and distinctly mentioning his statement as affirming the Hatford monument to be Chaucer's. This note is dated 1598; it also refers to the edition of Chaucer, with the poet's life, that year printed by Speght, which edition caused a good deal of controversy in the literary world of that day.'

'Maister Southbie' came of a well-known family that lived in the neighbourhood; he would therefore be cognisant with local gossip past and present, and if he affirmed the grave in Hatford Church to be Geoffrey Chaucer's, I would trust his belief, he being the man on the spot, rather than 'the best authorities' or 'Abbey tradition.' I regret that I cannot give the exact wording of the note. At Mr. Williams's death the folio was sold to an Oxford bookseller, and though I have made

inquiries I have not at present succeeded in tracing it.

The mystery of the nameless grave in the little ruined church took possession of my imagination ; the bare possibility that it might once have contained Chaucer's bones, that it might still contain, if not his bones, at least his heart—this last was suggested to me by the circumstance that the effigy clasps a heart between his hands—haunted my dreams. I burned to know what lay beneath the slab, and with the permission of the rector of the parish, and by his courteous assistance, I determined to have it raised. Two men, pledged to silence lest an account of the transaction should find its way into the local papers, were engaged to remove the stone on which the recumbent figure rests and to lay bare the secret that it covered.

Have you ever unsealed a grave that has been fast shut five hundred years ? It is a gruesome task, the remembrance of which will not leave me for many a day. No leaden casket containing a heart did we find ; not even an empty space from which the body had been removed. But just below the surface of the floor there lay, in a 'trefoiled' stone coffin, white and clean, the full-length skeleton of a man. Could it be Chaucer ? The busy brain that once beat within the skull

was dust; gone were the thews and sinews that had obeyed its will; gone was the garment of the flesh that had made beautiful the poor broken framework at my feet. As I gazed, Sir Walter Ralegh's words came back once more—I have already quoted them; forgive me that I do so again.

> E'en such is Time, that takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
> And pays us but with age and dust:
> Who in the dark and silent grave,
> When we have wandered all our ways,
> Shuts up the story of our days.
> But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
> My God shall raise me up, I trust.

Other thoughts, too, rushed to my mind—the question that men have asked since Time began—'How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come?'—and its sublime answer—'Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.'

We did not touch the remains of what had once been a man, breathing, working, weeping, loving as we do to-day; we did not disturb his slumber. In hope, not in sadness, we covered up again the

seed of the glorious body to come, where it had lain so long, and left it in the quiet church. Whether it be that of priest or poet, knight or merchant, is all one now to him who wore it. Not riches nor lands, nor titles nor fame, did he carry with him out of this present world, but the characters which, while here, he engraved upon his soul.

Farewell little church, farewell nameless grave that guard your secret still! I am glad to think it possible that I have gazed upon the mortal part of the father of all the glorious sons who sleep in the Poet's Corner. I am more glad to remember it has shown me that death, even in his most grisly aspect, is no King of Terrors, rather a phantom that each one creates within us. For what we call death is but the shadowed face of Life.

The Ford of the Heath can claim a poet of her own whom no one will desire to filch from her. Stephen Duck appears to have been more appreciated in his day than he has ever been since, or is ever likely to be. He was a Wiltshire thresher who worked in the village as a farmer's labourer at four and sixpence a week, writing his poems in the intervals of his duties. Some chance brought them to the notice of Lord Macclesfield, who showed them to Queen Caroline, Consort of George II. In all probability the pathetic circumstances of Duck's

life more than his poetry moved the Queen to assist him with a small pension and the gift of a house, thus relieving him from fear of want on behalf of his wife and children.

He was entered at Queen's College, Oxford, took Holy Orders, and obtained a living in Middlesex. His social advancement did not bring content, and four years after the death of his friend and patron he committed suicide when only fifty years of age.

His chief poem is 'The Shunamite,' addressed to her Majesty; he also wrote a volume called 'An Epistle from a Footman in London to the Celebrated Stephen Duck,' 'The Vision,' a poem on Queen Caroline's death, and various other works. His sense of humour was slight, if one may judge from the title to the Epistle and from that of an earlier poem which was weighted with 'The Duck Drowned in Parnassus, or the Goose Triumphant, containing Philip Goose's the Wessex Thatcher's poems presented to her Majesty.'

Some lines on 'Threshing' are pleasing on account of their artless simplicity and truthfulness; they bring before the inward eye a vision of the threshing-floor between the doors of the great barn, and the rythmic swing of the flails. After describing how the farmer bade the four men strip and set them to work, Duck proceeds:

Divested of our cloathes, with Flail in hand,
At a just distance front to front, we stand.
And first the Threshalls gently swing to prove
Whether with just exactness it will move.
That once secure, more quick we whirl them round,
From the strong planks our crab-tree staves rebound;
And echoing barns return the rattling sound.
Now in the air our knotty weapons fly,
And now with equal force descend from high.
Down one, one up—so well they keep the time,
The Cyclops hammer could not truer chime.
. . . . . .
No intermission in our work we know;
The master absent, others safely play;
The sleeping Threshall doth itself betray.

The last regretful little touch is exceedingly human!

Poor Stephen Duck was no mute, inglorious Milton, and yet his adopted home might well have inspired his muse to loftier lays. For the Ford of the Heath is pervaded by an atmosphere of romance. Perhaps the ruined church is answerable for this, and the time-worn manor, perhaps the lovely country all around. Full of sweet light and colour under the autumn sun, broken by soft dimples, flecked with dark patches of woodland, it sweeps away to the foot of the hills that passive, unchanging, watch the shifting throng of mortals below, each bearing his own little burden, each playing his own little part in the interlude of Time that for a second interrupts the drama of Eternity.

CHAPTER XI

SOME DELECTABLE REMEDIES

Some years ago a Danish friend, who knew England from books only, remarked in my hearing, 'The English eat snails—ach, I find that hor-r-ible!' I indignantly denied the accusation, but I spoke without book. In the district of which I am writing, or at least that portion of it in which the village of the Stony Ford lies, the children drive a brisk trade in snails among the operatives of a large town some ten miles away. The men buy them at 4*d.* a quart, have them cooked, and eat them in the belief that they will thus ward off consumption.

This curious specific reminds me of others that are still used in the Vale, and that deserve to be recorded before they are forgotten. In olden days, if any of the parson's flock were sick, he was their physician. 'In the knowledge of simples, wherein the manifold wisdom of God is wonderfully to be seen, one thing should be carefully observed,' says George Herbert with the mingling of naive piety and shrewd commonsense that characterises

him, 'which is to know what herbs may be used instead of drugs of the same nature, and to make the garden the shop. For home-bred medicines are both more easy for the parson's purse and more familiar for all men's bodies.'

From the parsonage the knowledge of simples filtered down in process of time to the cottage, only, it is to be feared, to be lost again in these days of education.

Fifty years ago every thrifty house-dame laid up in store dried bunches of common agrimony, marigolds, and other medicinal plants wherewith to brew herbal drinks of varying degrees of nastiness compared with which, as a victim of past dosings plaintively declared, senna tea was an amiable beverage. Now, however, more home-made wines than home-brewed medicines are consumed in the village—a small but significant token of its increased material prosperity, while patent pills and soothing syrups have to a large extent superseded calamint and tansy tea. Quack remedies enjoy an extraordinary popularity among the poor, who will deny themselves necessary food rather than forego these luxuries. I once took a compassionate friend to call upon an old couple who 'scrambled along' upon the parish allowance, supplemented by uncertain charity. Moved by their poverty, the visitor bestowed upon them a

small sum of money, expecting that it would be used to provide some additional comforts. The gift was thankfully accepted with a pious expression of the goodness of Providence in thus supplying their wants, 'Fur,' said the old man, 'all our pills be gone—we teks six at a time 'ee knaw, so a box dwun't last a girt whiled between us—an' we didn't knaw wotiver us should do to manage to get we any moor.'

Among the few surviving country remedies are hemlock water and cowslip ointment, to remove freckles and sunburn, and elderflower ointment, which is excellent for cuts and sores, as I can myself testify. An infusion of nettles is believed to be a specific for colds, and dandelion tea still holds its own as a wholesome and inexpensive tonic.

Other prescriptions, more original and less pleasant, some of which sound worse than the ill they are supposed to remove, find favour among the cottagers. A nauseous medicine is a jelly concocted from black slugs boiled down in water. This is said to cure a cold in the head; for my part I prefer the cold.

Here is a recipe that was given me by a woman who was convinced of its efficacy, and who wished me to try it. 'You must gather all the snails as you can find craewlin' up the church wall (tain't

no use to tek them as be craewlin' down't, 'cause they wun't do 'ee no good), put 'um in a pan wi' a little water an' bile 'um well, stirrin' 'um wi' a quill plucked from a black crow.' The result of the process, with its curious touches of superstition, is a salve which, when rubbed on the soles of the feet, will prove a panacea against all bodily ailments. It is considered particularly efficacious in strengthening a weak spine, and my friend assured me that she had tried it with excellent effect on one of her own children.

Not only by the virtue it imparts to heaven-mounting snails, does the church benefit pain-stricken humanity. In the coom from its bells it supplies an infallible and much-sought-after cure for shingles. Among cheap remedies, well within the reach of the poorest, may be mentioned two for rheumatism that are remarkable by reason of their naked simplicity. The first consists of a thread of scarlet silk tied round the sufferer's waist next his skin; the other, slightly more elaborate, promises him—eventual—relief if he carry a raw potato in his pocket until the tuber turns black, when a fresh one must be substituted. The prescription is wisely silent concerning the length of time required to effect a cure. Some of our people declare that rheumatism can be transferred from a human being to a dog by compelling the

latter to sleep on the patient's bed. No lover of animals, though, would care to avail himself of such a selfish remedy, even supposing it to be effectual, which is doubtful.

Cramp may be mitigated by wrapping the feet in a flannel bag in which is a lump of sulphur. When, however, I was informed that the same result will be attained by placing a pan of cold water under the bed at night, I was inclined to envy the childlike faith that could embrace such large possibilities. That powdered sulphur shaken into the stockings will render the wearer proof against epidemics is not news to many people. Equally well known is the doggerel couplet,

> If you eat an apple going to bed,
> You'll make the doctor beg his bread.

Another somewhat similar saying affirms that

> Folks who keep well in spring and fall,
> Will have their health throughout it all,

which is a fairly safe prediction to make.

A village remedy for cancer, that recalls the prophet Isaiah's directions to King Hezekiah, consists of 'Turkey' figs boiled in new milk; the latter is to be administered to the patient; of the figs a poultice should be made and applied to the part affected. The woman who told me of it

claims that it was successful in two cases that came under her notice, six and ten pounds of figs having been used respectively. For boils and carbuncles the common figwort may be recommended. The leaves should be stripped from the plant and crushed in the palm of the hand in order to break the tiny vessels containing the juice. They should then be bound over the gathering, which will yield to this treatment after resisting other, more stringent measures.

The villager's ideas on the subject of death and disease are sometimes difficult to follow, as when a mother whose daughter had died in childbirth remarked tearfully, ' I've felt ter'ble worried about her this long whiled, an' when I passed through the churchyard t'other day, I sez to meself, " Ah, she'll soon be layin' there along wi' the rest." I knawed how 'twud go wi' her 'cause we be in the Lion now, an' that's allus bad for mothers an' babies—one on 'um's bound to die.'

' The Lion,' she went on to explain, ' comes round every seven years, an' we be under him this year.' No doubt old Moore or Zadkiel was responsible for this cryptic utterance, the true inwardness of which I have never been able to probe. Another woman whom I heard of, but did not know personally, not content with being confirmed once like ordinary folks, persisted in

presenting herself as a candidate on every possible occasion. When rejected and reproved by her parish priests for her efforts to secure repetitions of the rite, she made answer that she did not see why she should not be 'confirmated as often as she'd a mindt,' she had heard that the 'touch o' the Bishop's hand is very good fur the 'elth, an' one moor head dwun't mek no odds to he.'

A hazy recollection of touching for the King's Evil seems to have moved this village dame, just as some Biblical allusion to leprosy can be traced in the following pronouncement upon eczema with which one of my rustic friends favoured me.

''Tis a cur'ous complaint, that ther' exemus; folks sez as it b'longs to the third an' fourth generation—skips over the first an' second, 'ee knaw, an' that it can't never be cured.' At what point, I wondered, did the 'exemus' begin to reckon the generations?

The people expend a vast amount of ingenuity in endeavouring to explain the origin of various diseases; thus diphtheria, I learn, arises from an excessive consumption of green apples, which produce in the stomach a disorder that mounts thence to the throat. Probably, by this reasoning, the old woman who complained that her 'stomach be gone up into my head,' was suffering from a species of diphtheria unknown to the faculty

Imported food—particularly since the Chicago 'revelations'—is held responsible for much illness. Indeed, the tracing out of first causes leads to singular conclusions, one of which is that the first person who speaks to the cat after she has sneezed will for a certainty catch her cold.

Old acquaintances masquerade under strange names in the village. The jaundice there becomes the 'yaller janders,' with emphasis on the adjective to mark the distinction between the black or the scarlet 'janders.' The 'brantitus,' 'pamonium,' and the 'triatic' are common complaints. Less familiar are 'insommania' and a 'wandering bone,' which last conveys a picturesque impression of homelessness.

It was in one of our beautiful 'apple-orchard' villages that the man lived—that he did so was a miracle in itself—who, with a 'guitar in his stummick' and a 'harmonium' in his chest, was on the way to provide the parish with the beginnings of a creditable orchestra. An old fogger whom I knew was once threatened with an ailment as novel as the preventative he employed. 'I wur that middlin', t'other day,' he remarked, 'that 'pon me sowl if I hadn't rubbed in some emigration I do b'lave as I should ha' had the purity in my side.' On another occasion, his wife declared he was 'sa bad, I wur fust to put blisters on his

head the blessed night through, to kip his pooer senses in.'

The mistakes of the poor, whose vocabulary is so limited, and who recognise words by sound more than by sense, sometimes entail pitiful consequences. Not every village mother is as careful as the one who sent back a bottle of Peruvian bark with the message that the bark was all right but that there was no Peruvy with it. I remember an unfortunate infant whose mother happened to overhear the doctor remark that a preparation of aloes would relieve the child. On his next visit he was surprised to find the little creature seriously ill, and asking what the woman had given it. 'Oh,' she answered, 'I heerd you say as sloes 'ud do her good, so I went out an' picked some from the hedges. She didn't want to tek 'um, but I pushed 'um down her throat wi' a cedar pencil.'

This story, by a connection of ideas too subtle for me to trace, recalls another that has no proper place in this chapter, but that has added to the gaiety of my friends. A clergyman in one of our large towns—it may have been London, I cannot recollect precisely—numbered among his parishioners an aged and very poor widow, whose only son was characterised by a rooted distaste for work. On one of his visits the clergyman was

surprised and pleased to find the old body neatly dressed and the room showing some attempt at comfort.

'Yes, sir,' she said, in answer to his look, 'my son's in work now, takes good money, too, he does. All as he has to do is to go twice a day to the circus *an' put his head in the lion's mouth.* The rest of his time he has to himself!'

CHAPTER XII

THE STONY FORD

Towards the close of the year 1289 Richard de Swinfield, Bishop of Hereford, travelled from his cathedral city to London to pay his respects to the King. Edward I. had but just returned from a three years' sojourn in Gascony; he was about to celebrate the marriage of his daughter Joan to Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, of whom we shall hear more, and was keeping his Court with great pomp at Westminster.

The season was what we should nowadays call a new-fangled winter; no doubt men so regarded it in that year of our Lord 1289, and sighed for a 'good old-fashioned' winter, as I believe they have done ever since the creation of the world and the turning of the first year. It must nevertheless be confessed that about the time of Richard de Swinfield's journey they had some excuse. Day and night, from the Feast of St. Michael till the Feast of the Purification, it rained without ceasing, and neither sun nor frost nor snow there were to bless the earth and help to make it fruitful.

From the bishop's point of view, the rain was an unmitigated evil. The fords were swollen, the roads almost impassable. Had it not been for the men whom his careful steward, Robert de Kemeseye, borrowed here and borrowed there, the carts would have settled down for the remainder of their existence in the mud of the Vale. My Lord started on December 20, accompanied by a numerous retinue that included his chaplain, his steward, and other household officers—well armed; his farrier, his cook, kitchen menials and stablemen. Behind this crowd, sumpter horses loaded with changes of clothes and bedding, carts filled with kitchen utensils, with meat, wine, venison from the Bishop's park at Bosbury, drinking cups and platters were strung out along the miry ways in a slow-moving procession. Soon after starting, the chief cook fell sick and had to be sent home—was he a malingerer, I wonder? His absence did not entail any serious consequences, judging from the Christmas bill of fare. The festival, that fell on a Sunday, was kept in 'good old-fashioned' style at one of the Bishop's Gloucestershire manor-houses. Fifty-five of his following sat at his board that holy day, when 'the boar's head, two carcases and three quarters of beef, two calves, four does, four pigs, sixty fowls, eight partridges, two geese, and bread and cheese in proportion' were consumed.

Beer flowed in unrecorded quantities; of wine the modest total of ten sectaries figures under December 25 in Richard de Swinfield's household Roll. A sectary contains four gallons or six 'bottles'!

It would appear as though two days were needed to recover from the feast, for not until the 28th was the journey resumed. That night the Bishop lodged at Fairford, in a manor-house that the Abbot of Gloucester courteously placed at his disposal. Food and drink the party carried with them; brushwood for the fires, oats for the horses, and litter for the servants' beds the country folk supplied in exchange for ale—Wessex men will still do much under the same stimulus!

From Fairford the travellers, crossing the Thames at Lechlade Ferry, proceeded to a little town at the western end of the Vale, a few miles from the village of the Stony Ford. Here the secretary notes that, the carts having been sent on, the cook was forced to hire pots and pans and the fuel and litter had to be purchased. At the Stony Ford, which they crossed next day, these same carts stuck fast. 'John of Wanating, a clerk,' who, we may presume, had heard of the Bishop's approaching arrival, and who knew by experience the Vale's evil ways, thoughtfully sent his servants to meet the cavalcade, and by

their assistance the vehicles were hauled through the water to what might be called by comparison dry land. At Wanating, the little town between the Vale and the downs, some six miles to the south-east, Richard de Swinfield passed the night of December 30, entertained, perhaps, by good 'John,' perhaps by Fulke, Lord Fitzwarine, who owned property there, and whose father had been drowned at Lewes in 1264 when fighting for the King against the barons.

High revel was held that night, sixty-four sectaries of ale being accounted for, besides the refreshment given to John's servants. The latter next day accompanied the Bishop to Reading, whither a guide conducted them across the trackless downs, and were sent back to their master the richer by sixpence, which would be equivalent to ten or twelve shillings in the present day.

Three weeks and three days later Richard de Swinfield, who had quickly tired of London and the Court, was again in Wanating on his return journey. Rain was still falling! The roads were a month worse, and the poor horses were so exhausted that they had to be fed on 'bread and mashes.' Some miles west of the Stony Ford the carts were upset in the mud, and the greater part of their contents destroyed or damaged. The

THE ABBOT'S MANOR-HOUSE.

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Bishop, still more his steward, must have many times wished himself at home.

After an interval of five years he was once more summoned to Westminster. On this occasion he got no further than Wanating, which place Clerk John had not yet quitted to become Warden of Merton College, Oxford. On his arrival there he fell ill, and when able to sit his horse again hied him back to his great manor-house of Bosbury whence, in 1316, he made his last journey—alone.

Since the Bishop's day a bridge has been built over the ford in which his carts stuck fast. The stones that gave it its name have disappeared, and lush green meadows, sunk in trees, skirt the stream on one side; on the other it expands into a mill-pool, cool and shady, where yellow water-lilies rock lazily, and the lilacs and laburnums that hang over from the miller's garden nod to their own pretty faces in the water below.

The miry track along which the episcopal cortège made its floundering way is now a broad white road, its course defined from afar by slim telegraph posts and by the trails of dust that hang in the wake of the motors. It touches only the fringe of the village, which prefers the genteel seclusion obtained 'round the corner' to the publicity of the open road. Though the place has lost much of its ancient importance, it more

nearly approaches the dignity of a town than any of the hamlets we have yet visited. No orchards thrust themselves into the main street. The houses, many of them solidly built of stone, stand in conventional orderliness. To the two greens that break up their regularity is due whatever picturesqueness the Stony Ford possesses. Above the larger of the two the church tower peers forth from its guardian elms that stretch their leafy chain from manor-house to parsonage. Near the latter, their windows to the rising sun, are some ancient cottages that make their more modern neighbours look crude and immature. And yet there is a certain charm about their crudity; they bear, to my fancy, an absurd resemblance to the little round-faced maidens who make the green their playground. Children and houses both wear the same ungrown-up, demure expression, half innocent, half arch.

Upon the green was probably held the weekly market which Henry III. granted to the Ferrars family, Earls of Derby, who had held the manor since the Conquest. The market has long since flickered out and only a pale reflection survives of the annual fair held on October 9. That is the parish feast-day, being the festival of St. Denis, to whom the church is dedicated. The story of how the patron saint of France came to be that of

the Wessex village leads us far back along the road of English history.

In the year 939 King Athelstane, 'Lord of the Whole of Britain,' was keeping his Easter Court at the Abbey that held so much land in the Vale, when there arrived an embassy from Hugh the Great, Duke of Francia, Count of Paris, chief counsellor to Louis IV. king of the West Franks. The envoy, who was himself a noble, Athelstane's kinsman, was charged to solicit on Hugh's behalf the hand of one of the English King's sisters, that namely of the Lady Eadhilda, whose wondrous beauty the Chroniclers have set forth. The request was urged with rich presents of vases and choice weapons, and of priceless relics, among them the finger of the saintly Dionysius, who in the third century founded the church of Paris. Duke Hugh's suit prospered as well it might! Eadhilda became his wife, and bore him a son, who, as Hugh Capet, ascended the throne of France. From him sprang the long line of princes who throughout so many centuries have borne the Golden Lilies on their banner, and who at the last have brought them as exiles to their mother's land.

The finger of St. Denis found its way eventually to the Stony Ford. Whether Athelstane himself presented it to the church there, or whether he gave it to the Abbey that again passed it on, I

cannot say. Nor does it greatly matter. The holy relic, like those who bestowed it, is no more—swept out, probably, at the Reformation. The works of the dead men's hands, however, remain, and the empty reliquary is seen to this day above the piscina in the sanctuary of the village church of St. Denis.

The edifice that once enshrined the treasure is a stately and beautiful building that grew from age to age. Many generations, from Norman William to Elizabeth, did their part in rearing it. One only destroyed where others had created, breaking down with axes and hammers the carved work thereof. The finger of the saint was not all that disappeared at the Reformation. The rood was hurled to the ground, the loft hacked away. Only the little 'bulge' staircase that ends in a dead wall and an entry in the Wardens' Accounts are left to remind us that an altar before which lights burned continually once stood high above the kneeling worshippers, wafting its blessing upon them from the foot of the Cross.

A later generation endeavoured to make amends for their forefathers' mistaken zeal in what they deemed God's cause, and the Elizabethan pulpit and font show that the church still maintained her hold on the parishioners' affections. It is a curious circumstance that though several families

of noble lineage were connected with the village, not one is commemorated within the building by more than a few fragments of old glass. The sole monument is a brass of 1398, to Roger Campdene, a priest. Outside, on the southern face of the nave, is a handsome fifteenth-century porch, the history of which belongs to the history of the manor. It is reared above the doorway through which the Lords of the Manor would enter the church from their house close by. As I have already told, these were from the Conquest to the year 1266 the Ferrars family, who inaugurated the weekly market.

Had Robert Ferrars, Earl of Derby, confined his attention to his own affairs; had he refrained from meddling in politics and allowed the common people to die as they pleased—fifteen thousand perished from famine in London alone during the spring of 1258—he would have done better for himself and his heirs. He chose rather to join Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, who stood for the liberties of the Commonalty, and when in 1265 Prince Edward's victory at Evesham restored security and independence to the Crown, Ferrars purchased his pardon by submission. The following year he was again in arms, but was defeated and captured. This time less leniency was shown him, and honours and lands were the price he

paid for his brief outbreak. A portion of the latter were subsequently given back; those in the Vale, however, had already been bestowed upon Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. The history of the 'Red' Earl is somewhat curious. He married Alicia, half sister to Henry III. and daughter of Isabel of Angouleme—one of the most beautiful and wicked women of her day—by her second husband, Hugh, Count de la Marche, from whom John of England had lured her.

Like Ferrars, de Clare had at first thrown in his lot with de Montfort, and on the eve of the fight at Lewes the two earls had received from Prince Edward and his uncle, the King of the Romans, a challenge to mortal combat. Their reply was the victory of Lewes, which, by placing in their hands King Henry, his son and his brother, enabled them to make their own terms and left them masters of the kingdom. To them, or to Leicester at least, we owe the first summons of a parliament in which representatives of the boroughs sat together with barons, bishops and knights of the shires.

Not for long was Red Gilbert associated with de Montfort. Several reasons (among them Leicester's refusal to allow the holding of a tournament!) served to detach this restless and unstable noble from the falling cause. In the spring of

1265 Prince Edward escaped from his warders, and Gloucester, who for some months had been in secret correspondence with the royalists, hastened to set up the King's standard at Ludlow. The battle of Evesham followed, the 'Protector of the English People' was slain, and the river ran red with the blood of the men who died for us—the heirs of the ages.

A grant of land from the demesnes of the Earl of Derby was Gloucester's reward for his desertion of his friends. But his turbulent spirit was not thus to be quieted, and within twelve months he roused London against the King. This spurt of rebellion quickly died out, and his final submission brought peace to the distracted country.

In order, no doubt, to keep him from further mischief, Prince Edward, who was one of the wisest princes of a remarkably able house, carried off de Clare in his train to the Holy Land, where his sword might profitably be used against the infidel. It was after his return that the Red Earl divorced his wife, on the plea of insanity, and betrothed himself to Princess Joan, who was born at Acre during the Crusade to Edward I. and Eleanor of Castile. At the time of the betrothal the bride was eleven years of age, the bridegroom forty. Seven years afterwards the marriage was celebrated with great pomp at Westminster, when de

Clare became the son-in-law of his former wife's half nephew! He died in 1295 at Monmouth, and was buried at Tewkesbury, the lands and title falling to Gilbert, his son. The latter was killed at Bannockburn, leaving his vast estates, that were scattered over twenty-two counties, to be divided among his three sisters. The eldest of these, Eleanor, a girl of thirteen, was bestowed by Edward II. upon his favourite, Hugh le Despencer the younger. The lot of wealthy widows and heiresses in mediæval times was not an enviable one; in the general scramble for a richly dowered lady's hand, she herself was the last person to be considered.

Eleanor de Clare, who brought as her portion the county of Glamorgan and the Vale estates, was certainly not consulted in the trifling matter of her marriage. Perhaps she did not mind overmuch, for her husband, thanks to the King, was a wealthy personage, high in royal favour and one of the chief officers of the realm. His grandfather, the first baron, had fought for liberty under Simon de Montfort, his father for Edward I. in Scotland and France. In any case, the union was not of long continuance. Seven years she lived with him ere the Despencers fell with their master by the hand of that master's wife. Hugh the Elder, who had taken refuge in the castle of

Bristol, surrendered to the 'She Wolf's' forces and was hanged outside the gates. His son fled into Wales, was captured, carried to Hereford, and there executed as a traitor.

The Manor of the Stony Ford continued in the Despencer family until 1414, when Isabel succeeded her brother, the seventh baron. She married first Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Worcester, and then, by special dispensation, his cousin, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. The historical interest of the manor culminates in the brief period during which it formed part of the Warwicks' great possessions. The story of that period is dark and tragical, closely intertwined with that of the Wars of the Roses.

Isabel Despencer's second husband, Richard, surnamed the 'Good,' was a remarkable man, the most famous knight of the age, who vainly strove to keep alight the flickering flame of chivalric usage. Accused of treason by Richard II., he came to his own again with the accession of Henry of Lancaster, on whose side he fought at Shrewsbury. He was the companion in arms and the rival in knightly deeds of Henry V., who by his will appointed him preceptor to his infant son. Richard faithfully fulfilled the trust according to his lights. That he was a strict disciplinarian is testified by an entry in the Parliamentary

Rolls according him the permission he craves of chastising the young King for his faults 'that for awe thereof' he may 'intend the more busily to virtue and learning.' When Henry VI., at the age of sixteen, assumed—in theory—the reins of government, his tutor was appointed Regent of France, where Harry of Monmouth's splendid conquests were slipping year by year through his son's weak fingers. Warwick did not live long to hold the post that carried more responsibility than honour. In 1439 he died at Rouen, and Henry his son reigned over his broad lands in his stead. Richard was a good man, who found time in his busy life to see many lands and to accomplish many things. He belonged to an age that was passing away—that had, indeed, already passed—the age of the old chivalry and of the old faith. One of the feats his biographer records of him is that on three successive days he challenged three French knights to single combat, and made good his defiance on their bodies. He knelt a pilgrim at the shrine of the Holy Sepulchre; he travelled in Prussia and Poland, and it is said carried his device across the dreary plains of Russia where 'wheat prospereth well' and where the 'women embroider their safeguards or their gowns on the outside from their feet unto their knees with particoloured or grey stuff,' and the

men 'wear upon their heads certain sharp and high-crowned hats made of felt, much like unto a sugar loaf.'

Gentle King Henry does not seem to have borne his stern tutor ill will for the chastisements he inflicted. He heaped honours upon his son, whom he created Duke of Warwick, Premier Earl of England and, save the mark! King of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Wight. He performed with his own hand the ceremony of crowning the newly made sovereign, a proceeding that must have struck the spectators with a sense of grim irony, in view of the fact that Henry Plantagenet's own crown was already beginning to sit loosely to his head.

The 'King of the Isles' died the next year. His infant daughter and only child survived him but a short time, and the Beauchamp estates then devolved on his sister, whose marriage with the Earl of Salisbury's son brought her husband the Earldom of Warwick together with all its appanages. Richard Neville, who united in his own person the power and influence of these two great houses, became, at his father's death, the chief factor that swayed the shifting fortunes of the Crown of England. 'Six hundred men in red jacket with white staves upon them' rode at the Kingmaker's back when he repaired to

Westminster. Thousands ranged themselves beneath his banner on the field of battle. Richard, Duke of York, was his uncle by marriage through his wife, the Lady Cecily Neville. Edward IV., George, Duke of Clarence, Richard of Gloucester were his first cousins. Half the barons of the realm he counted his kinsmen, and his brothers were but little inferior to himself. This great feudal noble the manor of the Stony Ford called lord.

The story of how, after helping to place the House of York on the throne, he repented of what he had done, prompted more by baffled ambition than by compassion for the dispossessed King, and set up Henry VI. again ; of how he fell fighting for Margaret of Anjou at the battle of Barnet, and of how the victor caused his body to be exposed for three days in London that all men might know the Kingmaker had fallen, is too well known to repeat here. His two daughters—son he had none—were but so many pawns in their father's political game. The elder, Isabel, he married to George, Duke of Clarence, in defiance of the wishes of Edward IV., who divined his brother's weak, treacherous nature and Warwick's scheming ambition. The King's opposition to the match was quickly justified by the risings in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, the avowed object of which was to place Clarence on

the throne. Though Isabel appears to have lent herself to her husband's plottings, the gossips of the day did not regard the alliance as a happy one, and ascribed the duchess's death, after seven years of wedlock, to the agency of poison.

The story of Anne, the younger sister, is even sadder than that of her namesake, Anne Seymour, Countess of Warwick. The Kingmaker, doubtful of Clarence's fidelity to himself, and desirous of having a weight in either scale, betrothed her to Edward, Prince of Wales, son of Henry VI. Whether the royal youth—he was but sixteen—was murdered, as some historians assert, in presence of Edward IV. who answered his cry for mercy with a blow from his gauntletted fist, or whether, as others say, he fell in fair fight on the field of Tewkesbury, remains a disputed point. Within the short space of three weeks Anne found herself a widow and fatherless. Her friends lacked the will or the power to protect her, and the King committed her to the care of her brother-in-law, who was more than suspected of having despatched her boy-husband with his own hand.

Clarence, perceiving his chance of the crown was small, resolved to aim at a more attainable, if a lower good. Anne was kept hidden from all suitors who would be likely to demand her share of the Beauchamp-Neville inheritance, and in

particular from his brother Richard, who wished to make her his wife.

From May 1471 until October of the same year the Duke of Gloucester was unceasing in his efforts to learn her whereabouts. He at length discovered her disguised ' as a cook-wench ' in London. It is charitable to suppose that his anxiety sprang from a genuine affection for his cousin rather than from a desire to share the Warwick spoils. A sympathetic biographer has endeavoured to show that Richard was attached to Anne from boyhood ; perhaps such was the case, for they were likely to have been much thrown together before her father cast in his lot with the Red Roses.

Having found the lady, Richard placed her in sanctuary in the church of St. Martin-le-Grand until he could confide her to the care of her uncle, George Neville, Archbishop of York. The following year they were married, Hearne says, at Westminster, and the Duke took his bride to Pomfret Castle, his official residence as Seneschal of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Anne's little son was born at Middleham Castle, which she had inherited from her father, and here and at Pomfret she spent the greater part of her short married life that was crowded with tragedies, in which he who ran could plainly read the hand of Fate.

In 1476 died her only sister, of consumption or—of poison. Clarence at once began intriguing for the hand of another heiress, Mary of Burgundy, whose dower of wealth, lands, and power dwarfed that of Isabel Neville. His mysterious and violent end in the Tower cut short his matrimonial projects and avenged the death of Anne's first husband. In 1483 the voluptuary Edward IV. paid the reckoning for his vices, his last hours embittered by remorse for the murder of his brother, and by the knowledge that he was leaving his two sons to the mercy of a man as able, as resolute and as unscrupulous as himself.

I would fain believe that Anne, whom Bulwer Lytton has taught us to picture as a timid, loving woman, was ignorant of her husband's designs towards his young nephews. Rather would I think that she knew little of the dark corners of his mind, and that his private life reflected only the brighter side of his subtle and complex character. That he was a generous friend and an affectionate father his detractors do not deny, and those two things count for much in the home.

The farce of Edward V.'s reign lasted a few weeks, during which Gloucester and his household resided at 'Crosbie Place,' whose fate is hanging in the balance as I write. The day of the young King's Coronation was fixed; the

summonses to the nobles and gentlemen of the Realm were issued. Among those bidden was one of my own forbears, the 'Harry Hayden' of the Paston Letters, whose father proved such a thorn in the flesh of poor Sir John Paston the First. Sir Harry, who was knighted this year, was Steward of the Household to Cecily, Duchess of York, and no doubt was present when the Coronation was actually held. For not upon Edward's fair head was the crown placed. Richard it was whom the barons and knights acclaimed as the Lord's Anointed.

Did any shadow of the future fall across the royal couple's path as they paced bare-foot from Westminster Hall to the shrine of St. Edward? Before the King walked Northumberland, holding aloft the blunted sword, followed by Stanley bearing the mace, who two years later was to betray the King at Bosworth. Behind him, carrying his train, came Buckingham, who 'could not abide' the sight of the 'Crown upon the Protector's head,' but 'wryed his own another way,' and who, ere the new reign was three months old, began plotting against the sovereign to whom he had sworn fealty.

The Queen's train was borne—absit omen!—by Lady Stanley, whose son, Henry of Richmond, was destined on the stricken field to pluck from

Richard's brow the Crown he won, wore and lost by blood. Fate of a surety laughed as she watched her puppets performing their magnificent play at Westminster that twenty-sixth of July 1483.

The following spring Richard and Anne lost their only little child, and he who had murdered his brother's sons was now 'mad for grief' at the death of his own. The unhappy mother never recovered the blow. From that time she pined away and died—it is said of consumption—when the trees were breaking into leaf the year of her husband's downfall. Fortune was merciful in sparing her that last arrow from her sling.

Betrayed by those whom he had trusted most blindly, forsaken of all men, Richard died, fighting with the fury of despair, alone, in the thickest of his enemies.

I have found no record of the Nevilles having resided at their manor of the Stony Ford nor of their having displayed any particular interest in this portion of their great estates, save one, that is as easy to decipher to-day as when it first was writ in stone four hundred years ago.

The porch over the south door was built in 1472 to commemorate the marriage of Richard of Gloucester and Anne of Warwick, and on the corbel-shields his arms may be seen quartered with hers.

The memorial shows not only that the manor fell to Anne in the division of the sisters' inheritance, but that she considered her union with her cousin an event to be registered in lasting characters, from which, by implication, we may assume that it was not distasteful to her. The erection of the porch would further seem to indicate a personal affection on the part of one or other for the place, and by letting our imagination loose we may conjecture that Richard's betrothed spent a part at least of the interval between his finding her in London and their wedding in the village whose slumbrous tranquillity the weekly market alone would disturb.

If this were so, she might well desire when she plunged into the restless, scheming, cruel world again to leave behind her a memorial that would recall both her sojourn there and her marriage. There is a touch of poetry about the impulse that prompted her to erect a porch above the little door through which she passed to worship.

When Richard of Gloucester ascended the throne, the manor became an appanage of the Crown, and vested in the Crown apparently it remained until the reign of Elizabeth, who bestowed it upon the Knollys's. Sir Francis was her Vice-Chamberlain and Captain of her Guard. He was further connected with the Court through one of his

daughters, Lettice, who was the mother of one of the Queen's favourites and the wife of another. The lady married in succession two men who enjoyed an amount of historical distinction quite disproportioned to their merits. Her first husband was Walter Devereux, first Earl of Essex, memorable for his brave but ill-conceived undertaking to reduce to order and to colonise a part of Ulster.

The history of this early attempt to solve the Irish Question, that is and has been ever with us, is one of treachery, murder, privation and failure, brightened only by Essex's personal courage. The betrayal of his guests, MacPhelim, his wife and his brother ; the massacre of Rathlin, where old women and children were put to the sword, will ever remain blots upon his fair fame. It is difficult, remembering them, to compassionate the unfortunate man who, after having half beggared himself, died at the early age of thirty-five of an agonising illness which some of his contemporaries ascribed to poison administered by the Earl of Leicester's agent. The rumour, whether true or false, did not deter Lettice, Lady Essex, from marrying Leicester, whose first wife, Amy Robsart, had been disposed of some years before, and with whom, it was asserted, she had carried on an intrigue during Devereux's lifetime. It was in accordance with the fitness of things that the son of the man whose

death Father Parsons lays to Leicester's door should have supplanted him in the Queen's affections, and if it be true that he himself died from a draught, given him in ignorance by his wife for whom he had had it prepared, retributive justice has seldom been more duly meted out.

His stepson, Robert, second Earl of Essex, the spoilt darling of the aged Queen's Court, played an even more romantic rôle than his father, and came to a yet more tragic end, as they are apt to do that hang on princes' favours. One of Lettice's daughters, Penelope Devereux, was the 'Stella' to whom Sir Philip Sydney, under the name of 'Astrophel,' addressed his sonnets, and with whom he maintained a tender friendship until his death.

The manor-house of the Stony Ford was probably modernised during the Knollys's tenure. The handsome staircase and some of the panelled rooms date from the seventeenth century, in the early part of which it was occupied by Mr. John Higham, a connection of the family by marriage, and Marshal of the Hall to the two first Stuart kings.

The village had other links with Charles I., several of whose troopers were buried in the churchyard. Both Royalists and Parliamentarians were in force in the neighbourhood in 1644, the

latter, as we have heard, having plundered the manor of the Ford of the Still Pool. The men of the Stony Ford hid their treasure more effectively, and not until eighty years ago were a number of gold coins bearing Charles I.'s head discovered in the thatch of an old barn.

A curious entry occurs in the Churchwardens' Accounts of this period. One of the disbursements runs: 'For blotting out the Kinges Armes and setting up the States Armes.' A few pages farther on Time's revenge is noted: 'For setting up the Kinges Armes, 1661.'

Before the common lands of the parish were enclosed those of the villagers who owned cows used to send them out to graze under the care of the parish cowherd. The animals were collected every morning by the winding of a horn; if this failed to bring them forth the cowherd would shout in the streets: 'Bring out your cow-cattle—turn 'um loose.' Throughout the day he guarded his meek charges, seeing that none strayed into the adjacent fields of corn; when milking time came he would gather them together, persuade them home again—it was little driving they needed—and announcing his arrival in the village by a second blast, he would consign them to their respective owners.

With the echo of that ancient usage, older

than the curfew, ringing in our ears, we will bid the Stony Ford farewell, and will take the road that Bishop Richard took six hundred years ago. Past the forge and past the inn it leads us; past the pretty bridge-house where once the tolls were gathered, the broad highway runs between borders of green turf and park-like meadows, obliquely towards the hills. A mile or so from the Ford a little lane branches from it into the shelter of tall trees. Thither will we follow, leaving telegraph poles and motors behind to amuse one another.

'STONY FORD.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE GOOSE ISLAND AND ITS FOGGER

The shady lane leads to an island delightfully named and equally picturesque, although at first sight somewhat difficult to discover. Where the trees stop suddenly short stand two or three brick houses of the 'cheap cottage' variety. Above one of these is a notice board, 'Goose Island Post Office,' which assures the doubting traveller that the village hides somewhere close at hand. All that he can perceive is an upstanding Georgian 'mansion,' a modest inn, a few cottages, and a homestead that looks as though it had been made of remnants from other buildings thrown together at different periods. The various tenements are planted at wide intervals round the marge of what is apparently a wayside meadow fenced with hawthorn hedges, towering elms, and the grey-green of the willows.

On emerging from the lane, however, we see that Goose Island is not merely a handful of dwellings set down beside the road. More cottages come into view, a couple of farm-houses, a manor

bleached by age, a tiny church with a tinier bell-cot, the schools that like some women show their age in their face, and—the conspicuous feature of the place—a pair of enormous yew-trees cut at the top in the shape of peacocks, and taller far than the house before which they mount guard.

The wayside meadow reveals itself as a green, wide, far-stretching, almost swallowing up the little settlement in its broad dimensions, that would feed all the geese in the county. For the name of this island, let me explain, does not apply to the character of its inhabitants, but to its eminent suitability for the rearing of the cackling bird. Flocks of them were fed here in pre-Reformation times, though never a one have I seen on the green in the present day.

The manor formerly belonged to our famous Abbey; the farm that goes with it is still called the Abbey Farm. It was given to the monks by Offa the Terrible, in exchange for another island, at their own gates, on which he desired to build himself a pleasure house, and on the rich pasture of the green were fattened the succulent geese that graced the Lord Abbot's table. This transfer by Offa is the sole fragment of history connected with the place that the local chronicler records. Concerning the later fortunes of the manor he is silent as the grave. An eel-stew in the garden

and the tradition of an underground passage to the church still link the house with its monkish owners.

A beautiful panelled room, painted in imitation of marble, and a couple of powder closets opening out of it, are the legacy that later possessors have bequeathed us.

No personages of importance outside the county appear to have made it their residence. And similarly, no knightly monuments adorn the tiny church, which nevertheless contains, for those who have eyes to see, much that is admirable. Skill, love and money were forthcoming when it was planned, and evidences of them remain in pulpit and roof, in corbels and door-key that were fashioned before the time when Richard de Swinfield made his journey. Of the two crowned heads—King and Queen—supporting the roof-timbers, that on the southern wall might well be a likeness of one of the early Angevins.

What Goose Island lacks in historic interest is more than balanced by its rural beauty. An indescribable charm pervades it, the secret of which consists mainly, I think, in the impression it produces of aloofness and space. The last is due to the way in which the dwellings retreat from one another. 'Folks did ought to live peaceable in such a place,' remarked a humourist, ''tis easy anuff to quar'l when arra-one lives in

a strit, but you dwun't sim to keer 'bout giein' your neighbour your mindt across half a miled o' sloppy grass.' The half-mile of 'sloppy grass' is ablaze with buttercups in early summer. Beautiful under many aspects, it is perhaps at its best when the long, hot day is declining, and shafts of yellow light from between the western trees lie upon the golden turf, when the ducks waddle home from the pond in a string, reflecting in their complacent carriage something of the supreme content of the hour, and the notes of the birds' evening song rise and fall on the scented breeze.

In winter, when the duck-pond in the corner and the ditches all around the green are full to brimming, and the damp air drips moisture on the damper grass, Goose Island is a less desirable place of residence. Dreary indeed must it be when a nor'-easter is blowing over the fields. Blue-faced children hasten home from school to set their little stools beside the fire; the shepherd heaps more straw around the fold, where the ewes are yeaning, and the fogger, knowing that ere the morning the snow-clouds will have released their burden, gathers his charges into the yard where 'they'll be easier to come at fur feeding' nor when 'um be down in the fields, pooer, dumb beastes.' There are many cows about the Goose Island, and consequently there are also foggers.

I like the word 'fogger,' it has such a primitive, Saxon ring about it, and to that description many of the older foggers correspond. The name, as every man of Wessex knows, is a variant—I will not say corruption—of 'fodderer,' and signifies the farm-hand who tends the cow-cattle and the pigs. The carter drives the plough and the harrow; he sows and carries the crops, and is responsible for the work and the welfare of the farm horses. If a colt has to be broken, he assists in the process when he does not himself conduct it; if the 'guv'nor' purchases additions to his stable, it devolves upon the carter to fetch them home to their new quarters, which not infrequently entails a three days' tramp from an adjoining county; when corn or straw have to be conveyed to a distance, he accompanies the teams and duly consigns the goods to merchant or railway official. The fogger, on the other hand, is never 'on the land.' His duties lie about the homestead; his time is divided between the farmyard and the meadows. He knows the idiosyncrasies of each one of his charges, and calls them all by their names. In the early summer morning, before the sun has dried the dew-drenched flowers, and while the birds are still twittering over their toilets, a light sleeper may hear through his dreams the fogger's voice—I cannot call it sweet—summoning

his charges from the pasture, where they have spent the night, to the milking shed in the yard. 'Come Daisy, Dinah, Spot and Clover; come alang then, come alang! Come an, I tells 'ee! Get tup, ye lazy, blank, blank critturs!' he cries in a crescendo scale of persuasion, impatience and anger as they manifest not the slightest inclination to obey. A sounding thwack follows, and the soft pad-pad of the hoofs in the grass is somewhat accelerated. Our dignified English cows are no more inclined to hurry themselves than is their keeper.

The stolid Wessex fogger with his long leisurely stride and his deep call, which seldom rises above a muttered thunder of expletive, presents a ludicrous contrast to the alpine cowherd. I remember once watching some Swiss cowsheds 'bursting,' to use the expressive term which the London police apply to an emptying theatre. They stood on an alp enclosed by rocks and woods. The green meadow at the bottom of the cup was still as the great mountain behind it when I first stepped on to the overhanging crag that brought it into view. In a twinkling the scene changed. Cows, heifers, and calves, to the number of several score, poured out of the sheds and spread like a flood over the narrow area. Among them rushed the herdsmen, running, leaping,

whacking, and shouting until the echoes rang with their cries.

Ably seconded by their busy sticks, they succeeded in imparting some of their fussiness to their cattle, which after heading blindly in every direction scampered down the steep, rocky path in a fashion that would make an English cow's hair stand on end. A skittish young heifer showed an inclination to straggle, and the energy expended in bringing the misguided creature back to the right way would have lasted one of our foggers his life.

'No hurry—time be chee-up'—in Wessex—he seems to say, as he dawdles behind his charges into the milking shed. Changing his coat for cow-gown or milking jacket, he claps on his head an ancient hat that has enjoyed for many years a close acquaintance with milch cows, and placing his stool beside the meek matron who heads the line, he sends the warm white stream tinkling into the pail. When the milk is set—poured into the cans put ready for it in the dairy—he releases the animals and leaves them in the yard while he goes home to breakfast. At seven o'clock he returns, drives them out to pasture, and making his way once more to the farm, occupies the remainder of the morning in attending to the pigs, in cutting fodder and in other duties of the kind. The evening

sees him fetch home the cows for the second milking, which with the evening feed brings to a close his working day of from twelve to fourteen hours' duration.

The Wessex fogger is an engaging personality, uniting artless simplicity with a strong vein of shrewdness. The one of whom I will here give a sketch may be taken as typical of the older members of his class, he is also an excellent specimen of that too rare product—the faithful servant, and as such deserves to be ' put in a book.'

One of his duties is to cash his master's cheque at the bank in the adjacent country town, for the money wherewith to pay the labourer's wages, when he is of course required to sign the customary receipt. The first time he went, he asked whether his mark were sufficient. On hearing that it would not be accepted unless he produced a voucher to establish his identity, he brought in a tradesman of the town with whom, to use his own phrase, he ' was very intimated.' The necessity, however, galled his pride, and he resolved to compass his signature cost what it might.

After profound consideration, he inquired whether it would serve if ' writ large,' and finding that size was no disqualification, he proudly subscribed himself ' Thomas Brakespeare ' in enormous characters across the sheet.

Though honest as the day himself, he is apt to deny his neighbours this virtue—we are all prone to imagine that we possess a monopoly of our most respectable characteristic! Thomas is no innocent rustic; he knows the wickedness of the world, 'an' what folks is, bless 'ee.' He singles out for special reprobation what a simple-minded person like myself would consider a particularly harmless form of amusement—namely, mothers' meetings. 'What fur do 'um goo to they sewin' parties?' he questions, himself supplying the answer. ''Tis fur nothen, I tells 'ee, but to see some comp'ny an' to chatter. When a lot o' oomans gets tergether they talks an' talks, an' them as has summat to say lets them knaw't as ha' got nothen. 'Tis they mothers' meetin's—my missus an' the rest on 'um—as helps to kip parson an' his fambly. Dwun't you goo fur to tell me; I knaws better!'

The lady who, by the purchase of the garments she hems at the meetings, contributes so materially towards the support of the Church, represents Thomas's second venture in the lottery of marriage. Sad to relate, he hardly regards her in the light of a prize. 'My pooer wife lies in the churchyard,' he is fond of saying when his partner's moods disturb his equanimity, 'the ooman I've got now is a naesty temper—clane, 'ee knaw, but a naesty

temper, wi' a wunnerful likin' fur giein' ma jaw-pie to ma meals.'

The story of how in his youth he paid brief court to a slatternly maiden I will tell in his own racy dialect.

'When Joe Trimble wur a-coortin' his missus as is, he axed I to goo alang wi' he, "'cos," sez he, "she be sartin sure to bring another wench alang o' she; then I can walk wi' my wench, an' thee canst walk wi' thine."

'"I dwun't mindt if I do," sez I, jest to 'blige 'un. So I went wi' Joe an' us hadn't got fur athert the fields when us sin they two a-comin' to meet we. He walked wi' his'n, an' I walked wi' t'other. We went shockettin' along the road, till us knocked up agin some young fellers from our place.

'"Hello, Tommy," they 'ollered, "do 'ee like taters, then?"

'"Aye, likes 'um well anuff," I sez, wunnerin' what 'um wur drivin' at. But when I looked behindt my wench I sin two girt holes in her stockin's at the back o' her heels as you could put two prize taters into! I didn't ha' no moor to say to she, fur that kind o' ooman udn't do fur I.'

As may be inferred from this story, Thomas is fastidious in his notions about feminine attire, which, he declares, 'did use to be a deal dacenter when I wur young nor what it be nowadays.' He

THE COWS COME HOME.

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could wish that his womenfolk still wore 'them nice full gownds what you could pull out a yard or two each side on 'ee, and just reachin' to the ankly-bwuns, 'stead o' these year draggly skeerts what be allus in the mud.'

It was Thomas, by the way, who rubbed 'emigration' on his chest to avert an attack of 'purity.' The remedy did not do all he expected of it, and a week or two later he determined to call in the doctor. 'I shall goo to Dr. What-d'ee-call-'um, an' get 'un to blood ma,' he said. 'I wur blooded onst afoor, when I wur a young man, an' the doctor he sez to ma, "Young feller," sez he, "if this runs grey, you'll be a carpse in the marnin'." A did run grey, but year I be, h'wever!

'My son Jim had the purity onst, fur six wiks; my pooer wife as was—not the ooman I've got now—she jig-jogged 'un back'erds an' for'erds in the cradle, an' he niver spake a word, an' niver yutted nothen save liquors. One marnin' t'other childern come in from schoold wi' a picsher of a lion yutt'n a man. I showed 'un to Jim. "Lukkee year, my deear; dost thee knaw what that be—you?" I axed 'un.

'"Aye, dad," a sez, "'tis a lion yutt'n a man." Them was the first words as ever he spoke for six wiks.' Such an invigorating effect did the spectacle of the 'lion yutt'n a man' produce upon

little Jim that he straightway began to revive and was soon eating, too.

The fogger's mode of addressing his son illustrates a curious custom the old Wessex people have of emphasising a question by appending to it an entirely superfluous tag in the shape of a pronoun which is generally of the plural number, no doubt because it is considered to lend additional weight and dignity, thus: 'Thee mindst an' do as thee'rt telled—*you*!' is a common form of exhortation. The second person singular is used by parents to children, by the men to the lads working under them, and generally by the rustic to those he deems his inferiors.

'Who bist thee, a-theein' I?' cried an angry matron to a neighbour with whom she had had a slight difference of opinion, and whose familiar style of address offended her susceptibilities. The speech is a fine example of the 'retort courteous.'

I have hinted that Thomas is not as 'comferble' in his conjugal relations as he would wish. Before he married his present wife, while he was yet an eligible widower earning good money, a poor old scarecrow of a field woman, a widow who had hard work sometimes to make both ends of her pittance meet, fixed her affections upon him. For long she worshipped in silence, Thomas affecting ignorance of her intentions. But her heart waxed hot within her, and at the last she spake with her

tongue. 'I've allus bin fond o' you, Thomas,' said she. 'I'd ha' you, if sa be as you axed I.' The situation was delicate, but the fogger was equal to the emergency. With a shake of his head, 'Ah, Nancy,' he replied, 'I'm 'bliged to 'ee fur your kind offer, but I 'udn't part true luv—not for whatever.' This was an allusion to one West, who was known to visit her, but whose admiration she did not reciprocate. Poor Nancy is a widow still!

The fogger's master was once the innocent cause of grievous friction between Thomas and his 'ooman,' who were then living at an outlying farm some two miles from the village. It happened one Friday morning that their employer found himself near the cottage, and thinking to spare his man a long walk for his wages that evening he called at the house and paid the money to the wife.

When Thomas made his appearance next day Jove's thunders sat upon his brow; he scarcely deigned to return the farmer's greeting, and for long he sulked in brooding silence. At length the smouldering fire broke forth. 'Plase sir, dwun't you niver goo fur to gie my ooman the wages agen. She didn't knaw afoor what money I tuk, 'cos lukkee I on'y gied she what I'd a mindt. Nows *she knaws*, an' I shan't ha' no moor peace sa long as I do live.'

Thomas might have done worse than take Nancy!

CHAPTER XIV

THE YOUNG FOGGER'S LOVE STORY

I HAVE given you some notion of how the old fogger conducted his love affairs. In his youth men were more practical and less sentimental than they are nowadays, or perhaps I ought rather to say that they concealed their sentimental leanings more successfully than is now considered correct. Through the young fogger's wooing, practical though it was from one point of view, ran a vein of sentiment that was patent to all beholders; while the device by means of which it was brought to an unexpected conclusion—but I will not spoil the story by hinting at the end before it is well begun.

I do not propose to tell in which particular island Joe Cornwall lives, because between the persons who want to be 'put in a book' and are not, and those who do not want to be put in and—mistakenly—imagine they are, a veracious chronicler's life has its uneasy moments.

Joe Cornwall, who lived with his widowed mother, was fogger at the principal farm in the

village, as his father had been before him. He came of a family that 'belonged to the place,' the natives of which, with true insular prejudice, disapproved of strangers, 'foreigners,' and 'out-town folk.' When therefore a lone woman somewhere between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, to judge by her looks, appeared from heaven knew where, and put a card in her window announcing 'Dressmaking and fine sewing done here,' the village considered that Miss Tompkins was taking a liberty, and ought to be 'treated according.' The subject was discussed in the house of Mrs. Champ, who had asked two friends to drink tea with her, as anyone passing might hear, the buzz of talk and the clatter of cups being almost as loud outside as in. The company was small, but what they lacked in numbers they made up in vigour. Similarly, though their topics of conversation were limited, they were thrashed out to the last grain. To-day the advent of the presumptuous stranger who had taken a cottage, and apparently settled herself down for the rest of her life, engaged their attention.

'Who be she, h'wever?' demanded the hostess, balancing her saucer delicately on the tips of her fingers. 'An' be what right do she come an' tek up one o' our housen as some'un b'longing to the place med want? I dwun't hold wi' these

out-town folks a-swarmin' in an' turnin' out them as is barned an' bred year.'

'The card in the winder sez she's a dressmaker,' murmured Widow Cornwall.

'A smart deal that tells us!' put in Miss Taylor, who kept a little shop. 'You may lay your life she ha'n't come for dressmakin'!' and the lady, who had poignant personal reasons for objecting to the stranger's presence, nodded her head and screwed her lips.

'What d'ee mean?'

'That she wouldn't set herself down in a quiet place like this without she'd something to hide, o' course. Fur all we knows, she may be a married ooman wi' a husband and children hid away som'ers,' and Miss Taylor looked hard at Widow Cornwall, who wriggled uneasily.

'I don't intend to ha' aught to doin' with her, myself,' continued the young woman, 'an' if you're wise, you won't neether till you knows more about her.'

'I likes the pooer thing,' murmured Mrs. Cornwall, 'an' I dwun't see as ther's any call to gie her the go-by 'cause we dwun't happen to knaw who she be, nor wher' she comes from.'

The widow was invariably weak where sternness was required, and her protest was ignored.

Meanwhile the subject of the discussion was

happily ignorant of the mixed feelings her appearance in the village had excited. There was not, as a matter of fact, the slightest mystery, not even a dash of romance about Miss Euniss Tompkins. Eunice was what her godfathers and godmothers had given her in her baptism, but the sturdy Wessex folk would not tolerate so palpable a corruption of a good old Bible name.

For many years she had supported herself and a bedridden mother by her needle. When Mrs. Tompkins died she was left with a few pounds in her pocket, a diminished stock of health, and an entire absence of flesh and blood belongings. In addition to these she possessed an inextinguishable desire to escape from the dreary Midland town where her dreary life had been spent. Her mother, during her latter years, had dwelt with the fond recollection of the aged upon a certain village where she had lived for a time in her youth—a village wrapped in orchards and green meadows, and girdled by slow-winding brooks; where the air blew sweetly from over the fields, and no rows of grimy houses shut in the wide blue sky. Thither accordingly, when she was free, Eunice resolved to transport her goods; there, as we have seen, she set up her former business of dressmaker and needle-woman.

Her reception at the hands of the women

of the place we have also seen. The masculine portion of the community had no part nor lot in this last. The verdict of the married men, on the contrary, was that the new-comer was 'a fine, upstanin' young ooman, wi' a smile what does anyone good to see.' The single men, having deeper necessity for caution, were less outspoken in words, though their eyes were even more expressive. Also, they shuffled their feet awkwardly, and coughed behind their hands when she passed them at Conversation Corner on her way to church, which are signs not to be mistaken. All admired her; two excelled the rest in the degree of their admiration.

It was gradually noticed in the village that whenever Will Tallet, the carrier, drove past the cottage where Miss Euniss sat at the window sewing he would check his horse and crawl by at a pace a worm might have bettered. If the weather were mild and the window open, he would cry, 'Good marnin', miss; got any arrandts fur me in town to-day?' And she would shake her head with a smile, or perhaps step out to the side of the cart in order to impress upon him that no persuasion must induce him to accept blue ribbon from the draper's young ladies instead of pink, because they happened to be 'out of' the latter. She would then trip back, singing, to her work, while

'WRAPPED IN ORCHARDS.'

A SLOW-WINDING BROOK.

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Will would drive away, a look in his eyes that was not there when he talked to Kate Taylor.

Miss Euniss's singing it was that first attracted Joe Cornwall's serious attention. She used occasionally to go for the day to sew at the farm where he was employed, and when busy about the yard or the piggeries he would stop a moment to listen to the clear notes. By what was, of course, mere chance, his hour for leaving work coincided to the moment with hers. The third time he overtook her at the gate he ventured to remark that it was a fine evening. Rain was falling heavily at the moment, but Miss Euniss, who perceived the friendly intent of the observation rather than its inappropriateness, opined that the morrow, which was Sunday, would most likely be fine because to-day had been so wet.

'Aye, that's like anuff,' he answered, admiring her sagacity. 'You never teks a walk of a Sunday, I s'pose?' he continued, with a boldness that surprised himself. She set him right on this point, whereupon he advanced a step nearer his goal. Would she, did she feel herself inclined—could she bring—'You 'udn't walk out wi' me termorrow, I s'pose?' he blurted forth at length, after much hackering and stammering.

'I should ha' been pleased,' she replied, wondering why so simple a request should cause such

confusion to propound, 'but I've promised to take a turn with Mr. Tallet. We might go the Sunday after, though,' she added, catching sight of his crestfallen countenance.

'You've a-promised to walk wi' Tallet termorrer, and sez you'll walk wi' me Sunday wik?' he questioned, eyeing her perplexedly.

Since he seemed to think some explanation was needed, Miss Euniss proceeded to tell him that Mr. Tallet, being a lonely man, with no one, he assured her, to speak to out of work hours, he'd take it very kind if she'd now an' then come for a stroll with him just to pass an hour or two.

Joe chuckled. 'He's a liar, is Tallet—I dwun't want to say a word agen 'im, but he's a liar. I reckon you ha'n't walked out much wi' young chaps, miss?'

'Never in my life till I came here; I didn't know any to walk out with, and I was always too busy, looking after mother.'

Again he chuckled. 'I thought as much. All right then; I'll wait my turn. Lord!' under his breath, 'I wonders what Will 'ull say when he hears?'

Will said a good deal—not to Miss Euniss, whose innocence was unassailable. Eventually, having worked off his anger, surprise, and sense

of having been tricked, he began to perceive the humour of the situation.

'I s'pose, then, me an' Joe must take turn an' turn about?' he remarked, to which she made reply that if they cared to do so they were welcome; if not, they were still welcome. She liked to please her friends if she could; if not, she liked them to please themselves.

Accordingly, Joe and Will agreed that each should have a fair field, and that neither should seek to obtain an undue advantage over his rival. The one drove Miss Euniss to the town when she was on shopping bent, and executed her commissions—for love; the other, impelled by the same motive, laboured at putting her little garden in order during every spare moment he could snatch. The village looked in horrified amazement, Miss Taylor with growing fury. But Miss Euniss pursued the placid tenor of her way, undisturbed by gossip that did not reach her ears, untroubled by thoughts of love, for which hitherto she had had 'no time.'

How long this state of things might have lasted, had not Miss Taylor intervened, it is impossible to say.

'I'm not goin' to stand it no longer,' she declared to Mrs. Champ. 'Everybody knows as Joe were a-lookin' arter me till she come along—

'twas as you med say a settled thing'—this was true, but it was only in Miss Taylor's mind that it was settled—'an' to see 'un took away before my very eyes is more nor flesh an' blood can stand. She must tek 'un, or leave 'un, an' so I means to tell her. The hussy! To pick up wi' the best young chaps in the place, an' keep both on 'em goin' like a pair o' scales, is nothen but a scandal!'

Mrs. Champ stood at her door and watched Miss Taylor stride down the road towards the dressmaker's house, her resolute gait betokening her determination to 'let that ooman know what I thinks on her.' Miss Euniss, who saw her from the window, made heartily welcome the only visitor of her own degree who had crossed her threshold since she came to the village.

'Take a chair by the fire,' she begged. 'You'll drink a cup o' tea with me, won't you?'

Miss Taylor, bolt upright, refused the chair and refused the tea.

'I wants a word wi' you, Miss Euniss Tompkins, if that's your name,' she began. 'You've bin carr'in' on these three months or moor wi' two of the superioriest young men in the place, an' seein' one on 'em used to come coortin' me till you got him away, I'd tek it kind if you'd please to mek up your mindt which on 'um you means to have, so's some'un else med have a chanst.'

An expression of blank bewilderment crossed Miss Euniss's face. 'What do you mean?' she gasped. And then in 'plain' language the other made her meaning clear; so clear, in fact, that she had the satisfaction of reducing her victim to tears, and of hearing her declare that for the future Joe and Will should be strangers to her.

This determination, however, was easier to make than to carry into effect. True, the Sunday walks ceased; but Joe would not be denied the pleasure of tending Miss Euniss's garden (when he found the gate locked, he lifted it off its hinges—it's the way we have in the country), while Will persisted in calling at the cottage to know what 'arrandts' he could do for her.

Moreover, the two men combined against the shopmistress and succeeded in turning public opinion topsy-turvy. 'Who be she h'ever?' they inquired loudly. 'She med keep the shop, but who be she, an' wher' do she come from that she should fancy herself sa much, an' ha' sa much to say agen other folks as belongs to the place a deal moor than she do?' for it was then remembered that old Mr. Taylor, deceased, had never 'let on' concerning his antecedents before he settled in the village. '*Other folks,* we sez, as b'longs year a deal moor than she do, seein' *other*

folks' mother wur servant at the Farm, years back, an' kin to Mrs. Champ ! '

That influential lady, on learning that Priscilla Embling, ' own cousin to my father's brother-in-law by his second wife,' was indeed Miss Euniss's mother, hastened to make good the saying that blood is thicker than water. Deserting her former ally, she ranged herself on the new-comer's side, and with her she carried the village. Though grateful for the moral support thus afforded, Miss Euniss could not be persuaded to relent towards her suitors. Miss Taylor's barbed words had wounded her too cruelly to be quickly forgotten, and spring found Will and Joe ' no forrarder ' in their wooing. By this time the whole community was deeply interested in the affair ; it was even whispered that some of the ' young chaps ' had laid wagers upon the issue. Wiser heads, however, were inclined to regard this rumour as a libel.

Matters being thus at a deadlock, the two men met in consultation to devise how they could wring a decision from Miss Euniss.

' S'posin' she wun't ha' neether on us ? ' said Will, who was of a despondent turn of mind.

' She must be med to,' returned Joe, who had determined not to take no for an answer, whatever Miss Euniss might say to his friend.

' We'll both on us go an' see her tergether, an'

we won't budge till she's passed her word to m—to one on us.'

That evening, when soft-footed night was stealing through the village, there came to Miss Euniss's door a low tap-tapping. She peered through the window, but could make nothing of the visitors who sought her at this unusual hour. Solemnly they stepped inside, pulled off their hats, rubbed their boots on the mat, and stood staring at her in embarrassed and embarrassing silence.

'Dang it all!' broke out Joe at length, 'you knows why we be here, Miss, an' we'd tek it kind if you'd be pleased to say which on us you'll have. We be both on us stiddy chaps, we both on us be taking good money, an' both on us be wunnerful fond on 'ee—ain't us, Will?'

'Aye, that's true anuff,' and drawing in his breath, Will eyed Miss Euniss wistfully. She did not at once reply; perhaps she could not trust her voice, which still sounded unruly when at length she spoke.

'It's very kind of you, and I thank you. But—but—I can't marry both, and it would not seem fair to take one and leave the other.'

'Don't you think about that,' cried Joe, eagerly. 'The one as is left knows he'll ha' to put up wi't. Come, Miss Euniss, tek him as you likes the best, an' t'other 'ull wish 'ee joy.'

'Aye,' murmured Will, his longing gaze still on her face, 't'other 'll wish 'ee joy.'

Argument and persuasion failed to alter her decision, and the men found themselves on the wrong side of the door—they scarcely knew how—a crestfallen, dejected pair.

'O' course you wun't go doin' her arrandts no more,' observed Joe, gloomily.

'O' coorse not,' was Will's despondent answer. 'An' you wun't go workin' no moor in her garden?'

'I dwun't see that; 'twill go to rack an' ruin if it's left.'

'Then you'll be seein' her every evenen——'

'If sa be as you trewly loves her, like you sez you does, you wun't want her peas and pertaters an' everything spiled, jest 'cause she wun't marry 'ee.'

'Aye, that's true anuff. I 'udn't spile a hair o' her head, let alone her peas an' pertaters. Couldn't you give ma a corner o' the garden, Joe, to work evenens?'

After some demur he agreed to the proposal, and henceforth was seen the edifying spectacle of the rivals both engaged on one small patch of ground, while the mistress sat indoors, her back to the window, sewing at fever heat.

Will was inclined to be jealous over his portion

of the estate ; in fact, after a while, one corner was carefully concealed from view by a piece of sacking. In answer to Joe's curious questions as to what he was growing there, he replied, ' 'Tis on'y a mossel o' mustard an' cress, 'cause I happened to hear she wur fond of it.'

' Lor', that ain't much to mek a fuss about,' laughed the other, who could point to a fine row of peas in blossom.

' Be you ever gwine to ax she agen ? ' inquired Will, a week or so later ; he had seemed uneasy and agitated the last few days, hovering uncertainly about the garden and peering with hungry eyes through the window at the dressmaker's uncompromising figure.

' I was gwine to tell 'ee,' returned Joe, avoiding the other's gaze ; ' I caught her at dinner-time, so 'tis your turn now if you keers about the same answer,' and thrusting his arm into the sleeve of his jacket he retired to the street, there to await his rival's discomfiture.

Will, who surmised that the front door would be locked against a second intruder, slipped round to the back, softly lifted the latch, and passing through the little washhouse found himself in the kitchen, face to face with Miss Euniss, who sprang from her seat with a cry of surprise.

' Would you plase to step into the garden,

Miss,' he began in quiet tones, 'there's summat as I should like to show 'ee.'

The request was too reasonable, too simple to be denied. She laid down her work and followed him to his own particular corner.

''Tis a bit o' mustard an' cress as wants cuttin'; 'ull you eat it, Miss, or shall I throw 'un away?'

'I'll eat it, an' be pleased to, Mr. Tallet, o' course; where is it?'

'Here!' he removed the piece of sacking that concealed his treasure, and gazed at Miss Euniss while she gazed at the green lines and curves in the brown earth before her. Suddenly she began to laugh—to laugh and laugh until her mirth threatened to end in sobs, and Will put his arm about her in order to steady the shaking, trembling little figure.

'You've a-promised to eat 'un, an' 'twas me as planted 'un,' he said boldly, for him; adding after a pause, 'I'm sorry fur Joe.'

'Maybe Miss Taylor'll marry him now,' returned Miss Euniss, with a touch of malice that poor Joe certainly had not deserved. He meanwhile was waiting round the bend of the street to commiserate his friend, but as Will was long in coming, he strolled back to the garden. As he passed the window two things struck him. Miss Euniss's seat was empty, and the back door was open.

AN ISLAND FARMHOUSE.

JOE CORNWALL'S COWS.

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A dire foreboding seized him. 'Wher's Will flod off to, then?' he muttered, letting his eye rove over the small enclosure upon which he had spent such pains and labour. Beside the border, near the gap in the hedge that fenced off the adjoining meadow, lay a white handkerchief. He picked it up, and in doing so his eye was attracted by something else. Will's bit of sacking was thrown aside, revealing the mustard and cress which ran in neat, green letters: 'Love one another!'

'An' t'other 'll wish you joy,' he muttered, as he stumbled into the street again—'t'other 'ull wish you joy!'

Joe still lives with his mother. Miss Taylor did not marry him after all, and folks say now that he is waiting for Euniss's and Will's little girl.

CHAPTER XV

HEAN'S ISLAND

THE road from Goose Island by which we have travelled while I have been telling you the young fogger's romance is one of the prettiest rural lanes I know in this part of England. The twists and turns of its leisurely course seem to say, with the old fogger, 'No hurry, no hurry; there's time and to spare for the distance I have to go.' There is space to spare as well, judging by the broad green margins which shocked the practical mind of a Colonial visitor. Occasionally they slope away to a mere selvedge, and then instead of standing apart the trees in the hedgerows on either side come together far overhead, and intertwine their branches lovingly, as though to show how glad they are to meet.

The hedgerows deserve a word to themselves. Never have I beheld such masses of May-blossom as are to be found in the lanes of the Vale. It is hard to decide which is the most beautiful—the piled snow-drifts looking ready to fall, the wild parsley that breaks in white foam at their base, or

the yellow stretches of buttercup meadows where the cows graze knee-deep. When the three, framed by a belt of dark shadowed verdure, are seen together, as you may see them, in a little glade that runs up from the lane to meet a shining tricklet of water, they make me forget to desire the brighter skies and more generous sunlight of foreign lands.

Few vehicles haunt the lonely road except rare milk-carts bound for the station, and gipsy vans that on their way to fresh camping places leave their mark behind them in a round patch of black ashes at each halt. Wayside cottages are rare, and the only hint of the sleepy hamlets to right and left is supplied by the 'handing-posts' that bear their names.

At the entrance of the village, whither we are bound, the road divides to send a branch past the duck-pond—every meadow on our way had its shallow pool fringed with willows—and the corner where the stocks used to stand, between ancient cottages to the church. Here let us enter through the Norman doorway which skilled hands have enriched with fold upon fold of moulding. Very different is the lofty, spacious fane, its deep chancel, nave, and aisle, and north and south transepts extending in stone throughout the ages the sign of our redemption, very different is it from

the humble little sanctuaries we have seen in the other islands. Modern restorers have done that here which they ought not to have done, notably, in adding the clerestory and thus destroying the noble proportions of the nave, and in blocking the squint on the south. At the same time, when one reads that in 1824 'the capitals are braced with iron, and the shafts bolstered up on every side with large slabs of wood and stone without any regard whatever to shape or proportion,' one feels that praise should not be withheld from those who mitigated such 'uncouth barbarism.'

Among the distinctive features of the church, it is not sculptured capital nor Norman font, it is not decorated window, nor even the few precious fragments of old glass, that captivate my fancy. All these are beautiful; they are likewise obvious, their symbolism is apparent to the casual glance. Infinitely more suggestive—in different directions—are the corbel of the arch opposite the north door, and the approach to the rood-loft. The first consists of two heads—that of a 'religious,' against which is pressed close a second, a horrid leering visage. This is evidently intended for a representation of the Personage whom our people name only in profane moments. I imagine, at least, that the man's mask stands for 'you knaws

who I mane' ; if it signify a monk, the original was of a surety no credit to his order. What evil suggestion is he whispering, I wonder, into the ear of the demure-faced little nun ? There is a special significance attaching to this kind of corbel when placed near a door, but I cannot now recall it.

Less earthly and more poignant are the reflections inspired by the ruined stairway, high up on the south transept wall, that once led to the rood-loft, and now from nowhere leads to nowhere. Suspended in mid air, in mysterious aloofness it remains, cut off above and below from past and from future.

For suggestion of comfortable family life we must turn to the many handsome memorial brasses within the sanctuary rails. Here may we learn scraps of the history of some of the families who made Hean's Island their home. The oldest brass, that dates from the end of the fourteenth century, tells nothing beyond the fact that here lies 'Dominus Seys quondam Rector Ecclie de . . . who died the second day . . . in the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and . . .' I could wish the gaps filled in, for I would gladly know more of Dominus Seys, who lies there so still, in his priestly vestments, his hands folded in prayer. His face, that by its look of haunting gravity has power to arrest the twentieth century traveller, is set in a

calm which five hundred years have failed to ruffle.

Not far from the priest is the memorial of a bearded gentleman in sober gown, between his two wives, who wear the full Elizabethan skirts, the coif and ruff. Below is a file of stalwart sons, not matched by the four daughters opposite. It is the burial place of 'John Ayshcombe, Gent, who had two wives; by the first he had noe issue; the second wife was Margery' . . . here follows a complete account of Margery's parentage, together with a statement of the fact that she bore her husband ten sons and four daughters. Please note that not only is the poor childless first wife's name omitted altogether, but the space provided for her coat of arms has never been engraved! Perhaps Mr. John Ayshcombe, who died in 1592, a year and three months after his Margery, took a first step that cost much, the remembrance of which he did not wish perpetuated.

Near him, beneath another brass, lie his son Oliver, who founded the almshouses at the Ford of the Still Pool, and Oliver's wife, who was a daughter of our old friend Mr. Yates of the Moated Grange. Presumably she turned Protestant when she came to Hean's Island. Within the narrow compass of the rails are a later John Yates and

another, later, John Ayshcombe, Justice of the Peace and High Sheriff of his County, who reached the ripe age of ninety-seven. The names Ayshcombe and Yates occur again and again in the story of the village, and are repeated on the monuments. A third name, which we shall meet presently, is that of Fettiplace; the brass figures of John and Margaret his wife have been stripped from the stone, but the inscription is left that shows they 'decessied' in 1510 and 1511 respectively. A nameless monument, the brass figures of a man and two women, probably represents a member of this family.

Two armoured knights lie near the Holy Altar, the head of one pillowed on his helmet. He sleeps in sure and certain hope that his 'Redeemer lyveth, and that I shall ryse out of the earthe in the laste daye and I shall be covered agayne with my skyne and see God in my fleshe, whome I myselfe shall beholde not withe other but withe these same eyes. This my hope is putt up in my bosom.' The glorious certainty of the patriarch of old, that down the long procession of the centuries has lightened the gloom of so many fearful souls, seems to burn with a yet brighter glow when shining through the medium of an obsolete translation. 'I am suer that my Redeemer lyveth, and that with these same eyes I shall myselfe behold Him.'

Humfrey Cheynie, who belonged to a family of position in another part of the county, would seem by his epitaph to have met his end in some untimely fashion. He begs his friend, 'whose lott may haplye be not farre distant,' to take warning by his death, and as he, whom Humfrey addresses, would wish others to implore God's mercy on his own behalf,

> So I beseke the, have in mind alway,
> To bed for me as offten as thou hether come.

The other knight who lies alone is an old acquaintance. Here rests 'Sir Christopher Lytcot, twyce High Sheriff of his County,' husband of two wives, 'knighted in the Campe before Roane, the 16th of November, 1591, by the hands of the French King, Henry the Fourth of that name, and King of Navarre, who after his travailes in Germany, Italye, and Fraunce, and the execution of justice to the glory of God and the good of his Country, ended this pilgrimage at Bastleden, the 25th of April, 1599.'

With the wish that the knight had left us an account of his wanderings, let us bid him and his companions good-bye, having already, I fear, lingered over long for your patience among the tombs, and let us go forth into the sweet sunlight of the temple not made with hands. Trees and

green grass welcome us, and here and there a homestead, a thatched cottage, an ancient house catches the eye. To right and left of the church are two remarkably picturesque dwellings. One I have already mentioned as the property of the Yates's. It is now the village shop and post-office, and shows the cognisance of its former owners—a 'gate'—in the weathercock and on the wall.

Still more beautiful is 'Prior's Court,' which abuts on the churchyard; its many beautiful gables, its square-headed, mullioned windows and Gothic doorways proclaim its antiquity as its name tells its story.

When Duke William of Normandy came to England, he brought in his train a soldier kinsman called Walter de Gifard, whose services with pen and sword—for Walter lent his assistance in drawing up the Great Survey—he rewarded with the Earldom of Buckingham, and with grants of land in 'Fyll the Wayne' and other counties. De Gifard, being in his way a pious man, was anxious to share his new country's good things with the Church of his native Duchy. To that end, and for the easing of his soul, he founded at Longueville, in Normandy, a Benedictine priory, giving it, along with other English lands, a manor in Hean's Island.

For three hundred and twenty years the French religious house drew revenue from their overseas

possessions, which thing was grievous in the eyes of the English people. There are among us to-day those who would fain 'keep our money in our own pockets.'

Henry V. resolved to humour his subjects in this matter, being the more ready to do so in that he sorely needed funds wherewith to prosecute his claim to the French Crown. The alien monasteries were suppressed, and by a sublime stroke of irony their revenues were employed to carry fire and sword into their owners' country. In later days, Harry of Monmouth's more pious and less practical son restored the manor in Hean's Island to the Church—in England—by bestowing it upon the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, who hold it to this day.

'Prior's Court' is a cross between a farmhouse and a gentleman's residence; inside, the sitting rooms are low and pleasant, the traces of monkish occupation being still clearly visible upstairs in the narrow corridors on to which cell-like bedrooms open.

It would be tedious to recount the history of all the manors in Hean's Island, which was anciently of considerable importance. Barons who dared to withstand their overlord; knights, the very names of whom recall as with a trumpet peal the days of feudal chivalry, of steel-clad warriors, of tourna-

'CHURCH PATH.'

'PRIOR'S COURT.'

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ment and joust; great merchants; country gentlemen who suffered in person and purse for their steadfastness to the ancient faith; religious houses; ladies whose fame was not doubtful but notorious; the sovereign himself, all held lands here at one period or another. Among the great barons connected with the place was Ralph de Camoys, one of the lords whom King John by his misgovernment, his insolence, his outrageous treatment of their wives and daughters, goaded into rebellion and—the Magna Charta. Lord of another manor was Baron Hugh de St. Philibert, a neighbour and associate of Camoys'; his name still survives six centuries after, in 'Philberd's Manor,' though his family has long since become extinct. When Henry III. came to the throne, both men made their peace and thus preserved their estates from forfeiture. Camoys, whose wife was blessed with the delightful name of Ascelina de Torpel, died in 1259; a few years later, his son sold the manor to Adam Fettiplace, the founder of the family, some of whose tombs we have seen. The story of the Fettiplaces, particularly that of the younger branch, is a romance in itself, and a voluminous one.

Adam, who for ten years held the Mayoralty of Oxford, was in all probability a merchant of the staple, like the Yates's at a later date. His

descendants acquired estates in every corner of the county, they married into almost every family of importance, and their monuments are to be seen in half a dozen churches within its boundaries. For nearly five centuries they served their generations as Justices of the Peace, Knights of the Shire, and Sheriffs of the County, dying out in 1731. The mansion near Hean's Island, where for long the elder branch resided, has been pulled down; a homely farmhouse, that is by no means modern, stands on its site, and the remains of moat and avenue are all that are left of its past glories.

'Philberd's Manor' turns another page of history. It passed from father to son until the reign of the third Edward, when Sir John, a valiant knight who had fought for his sovereign in Scotland and France, dying without issue, bequeathed it to the King. Twenty years Edward held it; when he gave it away, he gave with it that which outweighed lands and riches.

Among Queen Philippa's Ladies of the Bedchamber was one named Alice Perrers, who, according to chroniclers' gossip, was 'neither fair nor beautiful, but possessed a flattering tongue.' She was of humble origin, her father having been either a weaver or a tiler of 'Hunneye, beside Exeter, as some suppose.' We living in the Vale will take leave to differ from the historian

in the last particular, and 'suppose' Alice's birthplace to have been nearer home. At one time during her career she had been a poor servant wench; how she managed to obtain a post at Court—if she were indeed a Lady of the Bedchamber, which her enemies deny—remains a mystery.

In some way or other she succeeded in attracting the King's attention, and even during the Queen's lifetime she 'was preferred in the King's love before his wife.' Her growing influence, which was a source of public uneasiness as early as 1371, enabled her to gratify her cupidity in every direction. The late Queen's jewels, lands, moneys, cups, dishes, curtains, silks, valuables of every description her greedy hands clutched. Her jewels included 21,868 large pearls, besides thirty ounces of small ones. She held estates in sixteen counties in addition to three in or near the Vale, of which the manor of Hean's Island was one. Stow describes how three years before the aged King's death Alice, attired as the Ladie of the Sun, and attended by a brilliant cavalcade of lords and ladies, rode in a chariot beside the poor doting monarch, from the Tower to Cheapside, to preside as the Queen of Beauty at a tournament held in her honour.

Her insolence, rapacity, and vexatious meddling

in affairs of state so enraged the Commons that, supported by the Prince of Wales, they indicted her for corrupting the King's judges, for procuring false judgments, and for using her influence to advance suits in which she was interested.

Alice and 'all women' were forbidden to interfere in quarrels in the Courts, the chief offender was further compelled to swear that she would henceforth absent herself from the King's presence. So long as the Black Prince lived, she respected her oath. On his death the party of John of Gaunt came uppermost, bringing on the crest of the wave Mistress Perrers. Edward lay ill at Eltham; thither she hastened, not to leave him until he drew his last breath, when she stripped the rings from the dead hand of the man who had loved her, and abandoned the corpse for which she had no longer use. With the accession of the new king, Richard II., the full fury of the Commons' resentment fell upon her. She was stripped of her lands and possessions, that were as the breath of her nostrils, and the remainder of her life was spent in frantic endeavours to recover what she had lost. She died in 1400, leaving three daughters by Edward III. By her husband, Sir William Windsor, a needy knight whom she married after her protector's death, she had no children.

Those among my band who desire a more

detailed account of her career will find it in a book entitled 'Twelve Bad Women,' from which I have drawn much of my information.

Two of Alice Perrers' best manors, that of Hean's Island and of a village a few miles away under the downs, fell to Sir John Holland, to whom they brought evil fortune. The story of the Hollands is romantic and tragical. Their mother Joan, the 'Fair Maid of Kent,' was the daughter of Edward II.'s brother, the young Duke of Kent, whom the intrigues of the 'She Wolf,' Isabella, brought to the block, as they brought her husband to the horrors of Berkeley Castle. Joan Plantagenet married as her first husband Sir John Holland the elder, by whom she had several children. After his death she became the wife of her cousin the Black Prince, and mother of the ill-fated Richard II. The love story of her beautiful daughter, Maude Holland, is told in Froissart's pages.

Among the French prisoners was a young knight named Sir Valeran de Luxemburg, Count de St. Pol, whom the English King sent to England as he was desirous of exchanging him for the Captal de Buch, whom the French had taken. The King of France, however, deemed that the Captal was too valuable to set against the young Count de St. Pol, who was long time a captive at Windsor. The beautiful castle was an agreeable prison, and

the Count 'was allowed the liberty of amusing himself with hawking wherever he pleased in the environs of Westminster and Windsor.

'At that time the (Black) Princess, mother of King Richard II., was residing at Windsor with her daughter Maude, the most beautiful woman in England. The young Count de St. Pol and this lady fell loyally in love with each other; they frequently met at dancings, carollings, and at other amusements; so that it was suspected the young lady tenderly loved the Count, and she discovered the whole to her mother.

'A treaty of marriage was then entered into between the Count de St. Pol and the Lady Maude Holland; the Count was ransomed for six score thousand francs, of which one half was to be remitted on his marriage, the remainder he was to pay himself. When the treaty had been concluded the King of England granted permission for the Count to cross the sea in order to procure his ransom, on his promise to return within the year.'

The Count went to France—but, the young people's love being too true to run smooth, in this year a 'cruel charge was laid against him; he was accused of an intention to deliver up to the English the strong castle of Bouchain. The (French) King ordered him to be arrested and closely

guarded, declaring that he had entered into treaties inimical to himself, from which charge the Count was never able to clear himself. It at length came to nothing, for, the King of France not being able to prove anything, he was set at liberty.' St. Pol hastened to England, where his lovely bride awaited him. He paid the sixty thousand francs, married the Lady Maude and recrossed the sea, 'but did not enter France, for the King disliked him much. The Count and Countess went, therefore, to reside at the castle of Han sur Heure, which the Lord of Moriane, who had married his sister, lent him, and there they remained during the life of the King of France, for the Count could never regain his love.' This suspicious monarch was Charles V., who obligingly died soon after, so that the wedded lovers were not long exiled from Paris.

Maude Holland's brother John, to whom Alice Perrers' manor in Hean's Island fell, was created by Richard II. Earl of Huntingdon and Duke of Exeter. He married a daughter of John of Gaunt, and Froissart gives a picturesque account of the bride and bridegroom's journey home, through Spain and France. John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, it will be remembered, took for his second wife Constance, daughter of Peter the Cruel, king of Castile and Arragon, and in her

right claimed the Crown of Spain. Holland, through his marriage, became brother-in-law to Henry Bolinbroke, who later deposed Richard and ascended the throne as Henry IV. During the closing years of the former monarch's reign his half-brother faithfully followed his evil fortunes; when Richard fell, Holland was degraded from his Dukedom, though permitted to retain his lands and the Earldom of Huntingdon. Not many months passed ere he was deep in a conspiracy against the new King, for apparently he was one who counted blood thicker than water.

The outline of his plot was to proclaim a tournament at Oxford of twenty knights and squires, at which Henry, while sitting at dinner, was to be slain. The conspirators then thought to 'dress out in the royal robes a priest named Magdalen who was like King Richard in countenance, and make the people believe that he was delivered from prison,' he at that time being in 'safe and secret ward' in the Tower.

The tournament was proclaimed, the knights and the squires were invited, and with them 'many ladies and damsels. Several of the knights made preparations, and all the armourers of London were busy.' Alas for the success of the plot! The chief personage was missing from the joust—Hamlet without the Prince! 'God was

very kind to the King,' Froissart naively remarks—forgetting that kindness to Henry meant death to Richard—and learning of his danger from one of the band, he escaped to London. Holland collected five hundred men, set the mock Richard in the midst, and rode to Windsor to find the bird flown. The people, who did not desire a further instalment of misrule under the Black Prince's son, failed to rise, and Holland was killed at Cirencester fighting 300 against 2,000. His head was cut off, and with that of his nephew, the handsome young Duke of Kent, who had joined the conspiracy sorely against his will, was sent in a fish panier to London. Poor Magdalen's fate is unrecorded as being beneath the knightly chronicler's notice.

Holland's lands were forfeit to the Crown. Philberd's Manor, in which alone we are interested, was purchased after various vicissitudes by the Yates's, who held it until the family became extinct. Of the chapel attached to the manor, not a trace remains; while all that is left of the mansion is a rough trench and some irregular mounds that show where the moat ran.

Over and over again in studying the records of 'Fyll the Wayne' county does the Psalmist's sarcasm come to mind, 'Their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call

the lands after their own names. Nevertheless man abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.'

Of the several other manors in this island, one at least was the property of the great Abbey from the time of Saxon Edwy until the Dissolution. It is interesting to note, by the way, that the first Abbot was named Hean. In later times the Abbey chamberlain was connected in some way with the island. It is unlikely that he resided here, seeing that he was one of the chief officials to whom was entrusted the duty of providing for the clothing and shoeing of the community. More probably he drew his salary from the rent of the lands, that by Pope Nicholas the Fourteenth's valuation, taken in 1291, were assessed at 8*l.* per annum, of which His Holiness claimed a tenth.

It is impossible to say whether Hean, the first Abbot, hailed from this settlement. In the fourteenth century, however, the village gave the house a head, and Abbot Peter of Hean's Island, who died in 1399, is remembered as having acquired much land for his Order.

CHAPTER XVI

ODDS AND ENDS OF HEAN'S ISLAND

In wandering through the 'twisty' winding streets of this island it were easy, even without the evidence of the monuments and the manorial records, to perceive that, like the village of the Stony Ford, it was formerly a place of greater importance than it is at present. Many families in comfortable, if not in wealthy, circumstances resided here, as the many substantial houses indicate. The most striking, though by no means the most beautiful, is the Georgian mansion that lifts its tapering façade head and shoulders above its neighbours, and that by the ancient buildings in the yard and the great mulberry tree in the garden is seen to have usurped the site of an older dwelling. Its enclosure, bounded by a thatched mud-wall, abuts on the triangle of turf formed by the two forks of the road from Goose Island, which at this point unite to pursue their way to the eastern extremity of the village. On the green, adorned now by a sign-post, a cheapening cross is said by

some folks to have stood; others declare that the pound and the stocks were the original tenants of the green, while the cross was no chapman's meeting place but merely a boundary sign. The former theory offers the more picturesque suggestions, and I like to picture Hob and Malkin, Halbert and Doll, chaffering round the base of the symbol with Autolycus, prince of pedlars.

'Change and decay' being, as you have ere this discovered, the watchword of the settlements, the cross, whether 'butter' or boundary, has of course disappeared. Not time alone is responsible for the havoc wrought among the memorials of the past. Man's neglect and ruthlessness have done their part in the work. Even the dead were not suffered during the last century to sleep on where they had lain so long. Small wonder then that the cross was allowed to fall to pieces.

In the parsonage garden, among the roses, may be seen two or three stone coffins which, when the church was restored some forty years ago, were emptied of the bodies they had thought to hold until the Resurrection, and were turned out of consecrated ground to keep the gargoyles of the tower company. These last were deposed from their high estate by the same hand and now serve to support masses of ivy.

The fragments of the cheapening cross are

A 'TWISTY' STREET IN HEAN'S ISLAND.

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scattered in various directions, some the churchyard guard, others are imbedded in the bank that carries 'Church Way'; one, I am told, makes an excellent bridge across the gutter. To such base uses do we put our holy things. Rumour says that a resident in the village who loves such relics intends, if possible, to collect the remains and set them up again upon the green, so that the symbol of our salvation—or, shall I say, of our inherited commercial instincts?—shall once more preach its lesson to the islanders.

Round and near the triangle are clustered the prettiest cottages imaginable, some of which must have watched with winking diamond-paned eyes the comings and goings of Cavalier and Roundhead troopers. Roses, jessamine, ivy, Virginia creeper cover their walls. They are set amidst gardens that three seasons of the year are radiant with blossom. For the inhabitants are not only skilled gardeners; they are enthusiastic lovers of flowers. Irises, sweet-peas, dahlias, huge sunflowers, roses and a hundred more make the village, outwardly, an abode of sweetness and light. To the blaze of colour the encircling orchards form a rich background—green, save in spring when they are white, and when the radiance of their golden floor, on which the broken sunlight flickering through the snowy blossom-cloud overhead dances in

delicate cadence, eclipses the softer tints of the garden flowers.

The old-world appearance of Hean's Island is heightened by the flagged paths that still obtain throughout its length and breadth, though they are to some extent being superseded by asphalt, which, while infinitely more comfortable to the feet, is less pleasant to the eye. From the church such an ancient path, known as 'Church Way,' leads high above the road, which during a wet season is apt to disappear under muddy water, to the eastern portion of the village. In my opinion this is the prettier part of the settlement, the more deeply sunk in leafage, the richer in quaint, gabled houses and picturesque cottages.

Down the main street runs a tiny, sparkling stream that expands at one spot into a pond where on hot summer afternoons the cows stand in the shade and whisk the flies from their flanks, and where on 'Dip Sunday' converts to a particular sect in the village are immersed amid the unholy glee of youthful professors of opposition creeds.

Lower down the stream becomes a wide, deep ditch in which folks have been known to take an involuntary bath on dark nights—also to the glee of those who assisted them to crawl out. To enumerate all the brooks in and around Hean's

Island would, however, weary both you and myself. Some of them are 'law holes,' springs, that is, which by ancient prescriptive right may not be stopped nor diverted from their course.

Notwithstanding the over-abundance of water, the village is extraordinarily healthy. Here, it is said, you may live 'as long as you've a mindt,' and indeed the inhabitants are not, as a rule, cut off prematurely. On the wall of the church is a tablet to the memory of Mrs. Elizabeth Bowles who 'buried' five Kings of England. Last of all the woman died also, at the ripe age of one hundred and twenty-four. Though succeeding generations have not managed to beat that record, they have made many spirited attempts, refusing to drop out of the running under ninety odd years; one or two have even got so far as a hundred. When the sun shines both sides of the hedge you will find some of our old men sitting on the seats under the chestnut trees at the 'Four Shoot.' This is a spot where the stocks used to stand, and where, according to tradition, four rebels were shot during the 'War.' Another plausible derivation of the name may be found in the circumstance that 'Four Shoot' commands as many roads, coming from the four points of the compass.

Among the veterans of labour who resort thither is one who deserves all honour from his

country, seeing that for fifty years he has borne in his body the marks of the Sepoys' round shot before Lucknow. He was with Sir Colin Campbell's force that, after eight days' fearful fighting, succeeded in rescuing the little wasted band of English men, women and children penned within the Residency. The hero of Hean's Island was wounded the first day of the advance—a piece of ill-luck which, as he anxiously explains, was not his fault, for they 'had not left the camp at Alum Bagh twenty minutes before the bullets were flying as thick as hailstones.' A cannon-ball struck him in the foot, tore off his boot, and so injured the member that the doctor declared 'it won't be no more use to you as long as you lives.'

It has, however, served him haltingly for these fifty years, during which he has worked as a farm labourer. A pension of eighteenpence a day, the Mutiny medal with the Lucknow bar, and some memories that contrast strangely with his peaceful English life, are what he has to set against his wound. Above and beyond these, however, is the knowledge, the remembrance of which his countrymen should never suffer to grow dim, that he struck his blow and shed his blood on behalf of the prisoner and the captive, the helpless and the weak. And for that reason we who have to be content to stay at home working out a

day of small things, or who maybe only 'stand and wait,' have just cause to envy him. To strike your blow with the world looking on is easy; far harder is it to live out a crippled life ungrudging and content. He who does both is a hero in the finest sense of the word.

Near the 'Four Shoot' is the trunk of what in its glory was a gigantic elm that could shelter five loaded wains beneath its spreading branches. It is called 'Cross Tree,' because it stands near the cross roads. Its suggestion of superb strength reminds me of the torso of Hercules in the Vatican galleries to which Michael Angelo in his blind, helpless old age would have himself led that he might pass his hands over the mighty thews and muscles.

From the 'Cross Tree' the road leads past an enchanting row of cottages looking out upon an emerald green; just beyond is the Moat House, which is one of the many manor-houses restored, and as charming in its way as its smaller neighbours. Other ancient houses near by rival its picturesqueness, but before none will we linger, for at the end of the lane is one about which a touch of historic interest still attaches.

The tall faded brick homestead that, flanked by pigeon-house almost as tall and approached by a flagged path, stands apart from its fellows

on the edge of the fields, was the residence at one time of Sir William Scroggs, Lord Chief Justice of England, who gained notoriety by his infamous bullying of witnesses during the trial of the persons implicated in the popish plot. Readers of 'Peveril of the Peak' will recollect that Sir Geoffrey and Julian Peveril were arraigned before him, to be speedily acquitted on a hint being conveyed to the judge that they enjoyed Charles II.'s protection.

Scroggs, who was born at Deddington, was said to have been the son of a one-eyed butcher and 'a big, fat woman with a red face like an ale-wife.' A clever lawyer, an excellent speaker, a friend of Lord Danby and Charles's mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth, he speedily rose to high office. He married as his first wife Anne Fettiplace, and through her, perhaps, came by his property in Hean's Island. In his judicial capacity he rendered himself so unpopular to the people of England that he was impeached for high treason, for 'taking bribes, for imprisoning falsely, for endeavouring to destroy the Protestant faith, and many other crimes and misdemeanours.' Though acquitted on the capital charge, he was forced to resign his position as Lord Chief Justice, whereupon Charles, whom he had served too well, bestowed on him a pension of 1,500*l.* a year as a solatium, which he did not live long to enjoy.

'CROSS TREE.'

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Scroggs was the subject of innumerable lampoons and pamphlets that are curious reading. One, entitled 'The Bellowings of a Wild Bull, or Scroggs's Roaring Lament for being Impeached of High Treason,' puts into his mouth the confession that he trembled lest like Tressilian, Lord Chief Justice of England, who was put to death in the reign of Richard II. for having supported the King against the barons, he 'should be hanged at Tyburn.' He 'had hoped ere this to see the days of Queen Mary' when he 'might have piled those cursed, barking Dogges that used to torment me up in heaps like faggots and set them on fire.'

Another of the effusions that were hawked about the streets and found a ready sale is headed 'A satire against Injustice, or Sc . . . gs upon Sc . . . gs.' It consists of sixteen verses of doggerel, showing how the Lord Chief Justice's father was 'exempred out of all juries' because, being a butcher, 'he was a man of blood, Sirs.' But why the butcherly son should be judge and jury both,

> Can't well be understood, Sirs.
>
> A butcher's son, Judge Capital,
> Poor Protestants for to enthrall
> And England to enslave, Sirs!

Lose both our laws and lives we must,
When to do justice we entrust
So known and errand knaves, Sirs.

Some hungry priests he once did fell
With mighty stroaks and them to hell
Sent furiously away, Sirs.

Would you know why? The reason's plain;
They had no English nor French coyn
To purchase longer stay, Sirs.

For Butcher's son, like greedy Auff (elf),
Kneels down and worships Golden Caff,
And so did all the Jury, Sirs.

A similar strain runs through all the verses, which serve to show in what light the populace regarded Scroggs. He was indeed one of the worst judges that ever sat on the English Bench, and he was as bad in his private as in his public life—vicious, unfaithful, sensual in the one, brutal, bullying, and venal in the other. Swift tells a good story when writing on the subject of the Lord Chief Justice. 'I have heard,' he says, 'of a judge who, upon the criminal's appealing to the Dreadful Day of Judgment, told him he incurred a praemunire for appealing to a foreign jurisdiction, and of another in Wales who severely checked the prisoner for offering the same plea, taxing him with reflecting on the Court by such a comparison, because comparisons were odious!'

It is said in the village that Judge Jefferies, of Bloody Assize fame, once visited Scroggs at his residence in Hean's Island. Whether this be true or not I cannot say. The evidence appears to rest mainly on the letters 'J. S.' that, with the date 1672, are carved upon a chimney beam in the house. They were certainly known to one another, though Scroggs, who was a serjeant-at-law in 1672, was many years senior to Jefferies, who was not called to the Bar until 1668.

Near Scroggs's house is a mill where in the early part of the century a silk-weaving industry was carried on which, gossip states, was started by the French prisoners of war that were interned in the neighbourhood during the Napoleonic struggle. It has long since died out, as has also the manufacture of woollen cloth which kept a second mill busy higher up the stream. This last between the two mills widens into a full, slow, broad current, fringed with the ever-present willows. Through leafy orchards and meadows it creeps, providing a sequestered bathing-place for the youth of the island and a quiet walk along its banks for the pensive loiterer.

Pleasant it is on a summer evening, when the sun is slipping off the edge of the green world into his rosy bed below, to dream beside the dreaming water while out upon the stillness floats

the passionate sweetness of the nightingale's song.

This is a land of nightingales and magpies. Why I should thus bracket them together I do not know, except that in the down country the one was rare and the other I never saw. Here it is seldom that I do not meet a magpie in my rambles. Not being a Scotswoman, I do not drop him a curtsey, but content myself with repeating the ancient saw—'One for sorrow,' trusting Fate will shut her eyes when a solitary 'chattermag' crosses my path.

The mention of the rhyme suggests a village comedy that I heard from a friend in the neighbourhood who very kindly saves his good things for my benefit. Though, needless to say, the story has been clothed upon, it is in its essentials true to fact.

CHAPTER XVII

'THREE FOR A WEDDING'

'"ONE fur sorrer,"' murmured John Baldock; 'I knawed it—"one fur sorrer." When I sin that darned magpie a month ago I knawed as all the doctor's stuff wur throwed away an' wasted on pooer Marier.'

'Aye,' assented his cousin, Mrs. Packer, 'her time wur come an' nothen 'udn't ha' saved her. Well, well, 'tis no good frettin', John. She was a clean 'ooman an' kep you comfer'ble, but—it don't sim right to speak ill o' the dead—but her temper was none o' the sweetest.'

'That's true; 'tis to be hoped as she's gone wher' she wun't ha' no chanst—no need, I manes, o' showin' on't.'

'What 'ull you do now?' inquired Mary Packer.

'Scamble along as best I can.' And he sighed, moved less, it must be confessed, by sentimental than by practical considerations. Though Maria's tongue and temper had been pungent, her housewifely qualities had been undeniable. Since her

illness life had been a hideous chaos, and the prospect of this indefinitely continued filled Baldock with dismay.

Each day on returning to his comfortless home he would mutter anew, 'Oh, lor', oh, lor', what be I to do? I can't put up wi't much longer, I can't!"

He bore his misery through the winter, but when the earth began to stir, when buds began to swell, and birds to pipe, he sought his cousin.

'Mary,' he cried desperately, 'Marier an' me must part!'

'God bless the man, is a gone stark, starin' mad?'

'Part in'ardly, I manes. I thowt to stick to she, but flesh an' blood must be considered. My stummick wun't be'r cold vittles no longer, and an ooman I must have afoor I be a wik older. I'll pay she fower shillin' a wik and marry her at the end o' the dead 'ear.'

A flush suffused the widow's cheek, a conscious smile curved her lips. What more natural than that John should turn for consolation to his own kin? He was still hale, despite his sixty years; was taking 'good money,' and was known to possess an account in the Post Office Savings Bank. As long as she could remember, Mary had been fond of her cousin. When he had married

'HIS COMFORTLESS HOME.'

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a 'foreigner' from a distant village, she, with characteristic philosophy, had yielded to the importunity of Joe Packer, who had died some years ago leaving her neither chick nor child nor penny piece. She earned a precarious living by charing and washing, and when Maria Baldock followed Joe she may be forgiven for believing that Providence had intervened on her behalf. It seemed to her that the moment for which she had been waiting all her life had come at last.

'An' who will you have, John?' she asked softly. 'Would Ann Castle suit 'ee?'

'Nay, she be too old.'

A little cloud dimmed the brightness of Mary's face. 'Too old! Why, she be younger nor me. How about Annie Taylor?"

'She's keepin' comp'ny wi' Abner Smith.'

'What d'ee say, then, to Martha Stibbs?'

'I wun't ha' narra widder; she'd be allus flingin' her fust at ma.'

Mrs. Packer turned aside to hide her tears.

'I means to have a young 'un, this time; 'twud be moor reespeckful-like to Marier,' he went on.

'Suit yourself!' cried the widow, whose feelings were strained beyond endurance. 'Tek a tramp off the road, or a cas'el from the work'us, but dwun't ask me to help 'ee.'

He gave the table a thump. 'You've a-said it—you be a good sowl, Mary—wi' a wunnerful head. Goo up to the work'us an' pick ma an ooman—a young 'un, mind.'

'That I wunt, so ther'!' she exclaimed, and arose in her wrath. 'I wunners at you, John Baldock, that I do. To ask me, a decent married ooman, to goo to the work'us all that girt long way to pick 'ee an ooman! Goo theeself an' do thee own fool's arrandts!'

John stumbled to his feet, confounded at the sudden attack where he had looked for sympathy and counsel. 'I thowt as thee 'udn't ha' minded lendin' ma a helpin' hand, but since thee bist sa high an' mighty over'n, I s'pose I must ax parson to goo fur ma. Mebbe 'twud be safer to trust it to he; 'tis a man's job when all's said an' done, seein' 'tis fur to 'blige a man. Good evenen, Mary,' and opening the door he clumped out, too absorbed in his own meditations to notice that she did not return his farewell.

A day or two later, when Mary was returning home from work, her cousin stopped her to inform her ruefully that he had 'axed parson to pick ma a housekaper, but he dwun't sim to fancy the job neether, so I shall ha' to go meself. I 'udn't ha' thowt folks 'ud be sa grudgin'.'

Now Mary, since their last meeting, had had

time to reconsider the situation and to repent of her former hastiness. Seeing that Baldock was irrevocably set upon engaging a housekeeper, would it not be better that she should select her? She decided it would, and accordingly she now answered in cheerful tones that she had thought things over, and was willing to do her cousin's will in the matter. His face beamed.

'I allus knawed you wur a good ooman, Mary, wi' a head o' your own,' he said. 'God bless 'ee, an'—an'—dwun't furget 'tis a young 'un I wants.'

A few days later Baldock and Tom Slade, his under-carter, were unhitching their teams from the ploughs when they descried Mrs. Packer's buxom figure coming towards them along the high road.

'I've got 'ee a noo missus,' she cried. 'Her name's Susan Moss; she be comin' ter-morrer,' and without waiting for a reply, she plodded on to the village.

'Susan Moss,' repeated Slade; 'I knawed a gal once o' that name up Longwick way—a lively wench wi' a laughin' eye an' red cheeks fit to be kissed. A fine temper, too, she had.'

Baldock gave a fatuous chuckle. 'I likes a sperrity gal as can put a young chap in his place. Comin' ter-morrer! Lark, that's suddent!'

All that day and the next morning the picture

of a rosy, laughing lass danced before his excited fancy. He was setting out his dinner when he heard a timid knock at the door.

'Come in!' he cried.

'Does Mr. Baldock live here?' a thin voice inquired.

'Aye, come in,' impatiently.

There stepped into the room a pale, shrivelled, little woman of middle age who shrank before his angry gaze.

'Who be you?' he demanded.

'I be Susan Moss, your noo housekeeper.'

'Danged if you be!'

'Ain't you Mr. Baldock?' she asked in trembling accents.

'Aye, but the Susan Moss I engaged is a lively young wench wi' red cheeks.'

'Oh! ther's bin a mistook some'ow. I reckon you means my niece as is in the 'Ouse too.'

Silence followed for the space of two minutes, which seemed to the woman long enough. Then John began to swear. Mary, who had played him the trick, Slade, who doubtless had aided and abetted her, the workhouse officials, the innocent intruder were all consigned to the same unpleasant locality in the most powerful language his tongue could command. The sound of suppressed laughter outside cut short the torrent.

'I reckon '*tis* a mistook,' he said grimly, 'but 'tis one as can soon be set right.'

'I'll go back this minnit,' said the woman, who appeared anxious to return to the safe if unexciting refuge of the workhouse.

'Nay, I'll tek 'ee back meself ter-morrer, then I shall knaw as I gets the right 'un,' was his reply. 'To think o' Mary putt'n ma off wi' that little atomy,' was his reflection, as he took his way to the stables. 'I'll gie she a piece o' my mindt fur't —danged if I wun't!'

Mary's cottage was, however, locked; the blinds were down; she was evidently out for the day charing.

As a matter of fact, she was at that moment peering from behind the curtain at an upper window. 'I wun't gie 'un the chanst o' lett'n hisself out on ma till he've got tired o' his ooman,' she murmured to herself. 'Then us 'ull see what us 'ull see!'

At the stables John found Tom Slade giving the boys a graphic account of Susan's arrival: 'Wanted a nice young gal, a did, an' they sent 'un a li'le ole shadder of an ooman! You did ought to a-heerd 'un swe'r when he sin she! Fit to cut a train a-two! He could larn we summat——'

'Aye, an' he '*ull* larn 'ee summat, too, my

lad,' broke in the furious listener, scattering the group.

After despatching Tom on a tiresome errand and reducing the boys to tears, he felt more at ease. But the story of his new housekeeper had got abroad already, thanks to Tom; wherever he turned gibes awaited him until for want of a better resort he betook himself home.

The following day, which was Sunday, Mrs. Packer from her window perceived her cousin, clad in his best clothes, escorting the 'shadder' towards the road that led eventually to the workhouse. 'Blessed if he ain't taking her back a'ready!' she exclaimed, and threw open the casement. 'Johnnie, Johnnie, step in on your way back from the Union an' have a cup o' tea along o' me. I've a lovely cake—the kind as you likes.'

He reflected. 'Thank 'ee, I'll come,' he replied, with a singular smile.

Baldock and his charge reached the workhouse as the inmates were streaming across the quadrangle to church. The men he ignored; the women he scrutinised with a proprietary air. His look caught the laughing glance of a girl who gave him a sly smile that stirred his slow pulses.

'That's Susie,' remarked the 'shadder' at his elbow.

'A fine wench!'

'Aye, wi' a fine temper.'

'I likes a sperrity ooman,' was all he vouchsafed in reply to this second word of warning.

Susie proved the liveliest of companions during the walk home. From time to time the man cast upon her a look of foolish admiration. Tom Slade was right; her cheeks were fit to be kissed, and, slipping his arm about her waist, John tipped up her chin.

'My word,' she cried, returning his salute, 'you don't lose much time. Hello,' glancing over his shoulder, 'there's a couple o' magpies; "two fur mirth."'

'I on'y sees one.'

'T'other flod off afore you looked. That means sorrer fur you an' mirth fur me. There did ought to ha' bin three didn't there?' with a smile that banished his superstitious forebodings. 'Catch howldt o' my arm,' he bade, and walking thus they reached the village where Mrs. Packer in her garden was awaiting John. She stared hard at Susie, whose bold eyes raked her from head to foot.

'You axed ma to tea,' began John Baldock, 'so year I be wi' my noo housekeeper, as I've bin to the Union to fetch.'

The colour fled from Mary's face. 'Dear sakes!'

she gasped, and going into the house she shut the door behind her.

'Who be she?' inquired the girl jealously.

'A widder ooman as is kin to ma.'

'Ah, she'd a-liked to ha' bin your housekeeper,' was Susie's dry rejoinder.

Near Baldock's cottage they met Tom Slade, who also stared at her. 'By gum, he's bin an' fot the young 'un! How be, Sue? Ha' you forgot your ole sweetheart?'

'Tom! who'd a-thought o' seein' you here?'

Dropping her swain's arm, she would have flung herself upon the young man had not John seized her wrist. 'Stap it!' he said roughly. 'You b'longs to me, an' I wun't have 'ee car'in' on wi' no young chaps. D'ee hear—you?'

Susie turned on him in a fury. 'I shall car' on wi' who I've a mindt, thee ole——' adding an epithet that was neither polite nor refined.

John stood confounded. 'I'll send 'ee back wher' you come from,' he spluttered when he could find words.

She stepped close to him and looked him straight between the eyes. 'If you thinks you be gwine to fool me as you fooled my aunt, you're wrong, mister! You've undertook to marry me, an' you'll ha' to do't whether you likes it or whether you dwun't.'

'Dally,' muttered Tom, 'he've found his missus an' no mistake!' as Susie proceeded to quell further signs of resistance, finally reducing her employer to a state of abject submission. And Tom, as Baldock learnt, was right. Maria's yoke had been heavy but Susie added to her yoke; whereas Maria had chastised him with whips, Susie chastised him with scorpions. So long as the novelty of her new position lasted, so long did John's satisfaction in his youthful housekeeper endure. Both were equally short-lived!

He soon grew to hate the bold eyes that laughed at other men; the red cheeks he used to kiss. And Susie, noting the change, shortened his fetters and tightened the screws. The 'Magpie,' where in old days he had sought peace from domestic storms, knew him no more; his friends never saw him save on Sundays when he and Susie paraded the village arm-in-arm, he looking 'as if a wur follerin' his own fun'ral.' These state processions, which he loathed, served to emphasise the girl's determination of holding him to his bargain and to counteract the effect of her flirtations during the week with Tom Slade and with Abner Smith, Annie Taylor's young man, who had deserted his legitimate sweetheart to dally with Sue. It was during the course of the Sunday parade that she told Baldock she meant to have

the banns put in shortly, because she was 'tired o' livin' single.'

'Send in our names this day fartnight?' he faltered. 'But the dead 'ear wun't be up this long whiled.'

'The dead 'ear's nought to me. I'll wait a month an' not a minnit longer.'

In desperation he wrenched himself from her irksome hold. 'I've changed my mindt 'bout marryin' on 'ee, Sue. I'll pay 'ee your wages fur the rest o' the twel' month, an' you can get 'ee another place.'

'But I ha'n't changed *my* mindt, my man. If sa be as you wun't send in our names, I will.'

He groaned. 'What 'ull you tek to let ma off?'

'What 'ull you give?'

'I've twen'y pound in the bank; you shall have the half on't.'

The girl burst into a loud laugh. 'D'ee tek ma fur a fool, John Baldock? When we be wed I shall ha' the handlin' o' your twen'y pound an' all your wages as well. I've got a good home, an' a stiddy man o' ripe age what I've put in his place, an' I means to stick to 'em.'

'You'll ha' to send in the names, then, fur I wun't,' was his sullen answer.

While smoking a melancholy pipe in the garden

that evening he cast about him for some way out of the noose into which he had so heedlessly thrust his neck. Susie was hanging on the gate, amusing herself with Tom and Abner. Suddenly John came to a tremendous decision. Slipping round the back of the house, he ran to Mrs. Packer's cottage. 'Let ma in, Mary, fur pity's sake!' he implored. (They had not spoken since the fateful Sunday of Susie's arrival.)

'What d'ee want?' was her cold greeting.

Briefly he told his story, of how Susie stripped him of his wages, of how she forbade him to set foot inside public, or pass the time of day with his own kin; of how she spied upon him so that he could scarce call his soul his own, much less a minute of his time—and finally of how she said she would put up the banns this day fortnight because she was 'tired o' livin' single.'

'What be I to do, Mary?'

'Marry the wench, I s'pose,' returned Mrs. Packer, whose lips were tight set.

'I'll hang meself in th'ole barn fust! I thowt mebbe you 'ud ha' found some way out on't fur ma,' and he groped for the door.

'John,' she cried, catching at his hand, 'stap a minnit—oh, my dear, I'm sorry for 'ee from my heart! Stap a minnit an' let's think what us can do.'

He sank into a chair and put up his hand to hide his tears. The sight of him thus broken filled her with a passion of pity.

'Folks sez Abner an' Tom are mighty taken wi' her; 'udn't one o' they have her 'stead o' you?' suggested Mary.

'I axed she onst if she 'udn't soonder marry a young chap; but not she! "They be too much gin to knockin' arraone about if you looses your tongue on 'em," sez she. Lord, lord, it med well ha' bin "One fur sorrer" when she come into the 'ouse! I'd a deal better ha' kep' your little old ooman.'

Mrs. Packer moved restlessly about the room. 'You 'udn't have a widder, else I knawed one—as med ha'—suited 'ee.' She turned and faced him, the warm colour mounting to her brow. As John, in startled silence, gave her back look for look, some words of Susie's flashed into his mind.

'Mary!' he shouted, leaping to his feet, 'why didn't 'ee tell ma that afoor?'

'You said you 'udn't ha' narra widder.'

'Ah, but you—you was diff'rent—I niver thowt o' you as a widder. Lawk-a-massy, what a darned bally, blunderin' fool I've a-bin!'

She drew his head on to her bosom. 'Dwun't 'ee tek on, my dear—I can't abe'r to see you cry. She can't mek 'ee wed she, when all's said an done.'

'I'm tur'ble afeared as she 'ull, if sa be as I ben't dead fust; but I'll see if I can't get quit on her some'ow—dang me if I wun't!'

When Baldock and Tom Slade were eating their 'nunchin' the following morning, the former opened fire. 'Tom,' said he, ''ull you marry Sue 'stead o' me? I'll mek it worth your whiled.'

'Not if you was to pay ma a hundered pounds down. I ain't the young fool I wur when I fust took on wi' she, an' I've sin too much o' the way she uses you to want to step into your shoes.'

'The wust on it is as I wants another ooman,' groaned Baldock, and out came the whole story.

'I'm sorry for 'ee, 'pon me sowl I be,' remarked Tom, 'but I dwun't run to Susie till death us do part. Can't us do nothen to best her?'

For ten minutes he sat thinking, then smacking his thigh, he unfolded a scheme, the boldness of which made John gasp.

'I'll year what Mary thinks on't,' he said, 'an' I'll gie Susie warnin'; if sa be as she wun't belave ma, 'tis her look-out.'

Mrs. Packer was sitting sewing one evening that week, when she heard a low tap on the window.

'John,' she whispered.

'Aye, 'tis all right. God bless 'ee, my dear. Mary, I sin three magpies to-day.'

She laughed. 'Maybe they're for Susie. There's many a slip, 'ee know.'

'Ther' shan't be none this time. Mary, come nigher—nigher 'it. Dang this fur a narrer winder.'

Susie duly sent to the clerk her name and John's, and informed her friends that she intended to be married the day after the 'askings' were out. It is not considered etiquette in rustic circles to hear your own names read; John was therefore surprised when on the third Sunday morning she bade him accompany her to church.

'I 'udn't go if I was you,' he said weakly, quailing before the consequences that would ensue did she persist in her intention. Opposition, however, only served to strengthen her resolve. The bells were chiming when they started, Susie in her smartest gown, clinging to the arm of her reluctant escort.

'Be gwine to church, then?' questioned the youths whom they met.

'Aye, to year our names read,' was her reply, which elicited a burst of suppressed giggling. Quickly the news was passed from mouth to mouth, and a small crowd collected and followed the couple to the church porch.

'Why in God's name didn't 'ee kip she at home?' whispered Tom Slade in John's ear as they entered.

'She '*ud* come, bless 'ee; I reckon she sniffs out summat.'

'Let me sit by her, or she'll kick up a row, an' then we're like to get into trubble.'

Baldock, nothing loth, contrived as though by accident to give his place to Slade, and heedless of Sue's angry looks, seated himself by Mary Packer. As the service proceeded, public interest in the bride quickened; and when the parson closed the Bible—'Here endeth the second Lesson,'—every eye was fixed upon her. In the momentary pause that followed, you might have heard the proverbial pin drop. The organ sounded the first note of the chant.

'Stop!' cried Susie, jumping up, 'you've furgot the banns——'

'Be quiet, cassn't 'ee,' growled Tom Slade, clapping his hand over her mouth; 'everybody's a-larfin' at 'ee.'

Wildly she cast her eyes around. On every face, save on John's and Mary's, was a broad grin of delight. In an instant the truth broke upon her. She had been tricked by the man she despised; she had been made the laughing-stock of the villagers, who one and all had sympathised with him, and had conspired to keep his secret.

'Aye, but she was mad!' said a gossip, whose virtue in attending church that morning had

been unexpectedly rewarded, to a less fortunate and less virtuous neighbour. 'Flung out straight away, a did, an' waited fur John in the porch. Didn't she just about gin he the length o' her tongue. "You wun't get the better o' me," she screeches, "fur I'll marry you yet, dang ma if I wun't!" "I dwun't think as how you 'ull," sez he, quiet-like; "'cause Mary an' me—putt'n his arm round Mrs. Packer—was married at the registrar's 'issterday." You did ought to a-sin Sue! She wur fair craw-choked wi' rage. "'Tis your own fault," sez John, "I gin you warnin', but you 'udn't belave ma."'

'Aw, pooer Johnnie. He knawed he 'udn't be safe till he'd put another ooman betwix' Sue an' hisself. What's she gwine to do now?'

'Tom Slade telled her she'd best be sens'ble an' tek the ten pound John offered her. "An' mebbe," sez he, "Abner Smith ain't o' the same opinion as Johnnie." Blessed if she didn't goo off to Abner's mother, an' folks is a-sayin' this arternoon as the names 'ull be up nex' Sunday. She means to year 'um read every time, to mek sure Abner ha'n't bin to clerk, like t'other, an' stopped 'um on the quiet.'

'So I've got a missus at last,' remarked Baldock as he and Mary sat together that evening.

'A wife,' she corrected. 'Be you happy, John?'

'Just about. Be you?'

'Aye,' and the fulness of content that breathed in the simple word satisfied him.

'I'm sorry for Sue,' she said presently.

'You 'udn't be if you'd lived along o' she fur two months an' moor. Dally, it meks I trimble to think on't.'

'Don't think on't. Lark, my dear, you did ought to be a proud man seein' it's took three oomans to get 'ee one wife.'

He laughed and slipped his arm about her. 'That's just egsackly right then.'

One fur sorrer,

quoted Mary—

Two fur mirth,
Three fur a weddin',
Four for a b——

stopping suddenly short.

John chuckled. 'Next 'ear, plase God, us med p'raps see fower,' he whispered. 'Lark, my dear, what a fine colour you've got, an' how saft an' warm your cheeks are—better a sight nor that young Susie's!'

My tale is told, our wanderings are nearly done, but ere we part company, there is one spot to which I would guide you, and where if you are minded you can refresh yourselves after our travels. Some two miles from Hean's Island is an inn

dignified with the name of the 'Noah's Ark,' an ancient and respectable title, most suitable for a house to which all sorts and conditions of men resort. This tavern is noteworthy as having been, according to that useful authority, local tradition, the home for a while of Mother Shipton, and as we walk thither I will recount some of her prophecies, confessing at the same time that I consider it highly improbable she was ever in this neighbourhood. Somerset, however, puts in a claim to her presence, so I do not see why 'Fyll the Wayne' should not do likewise, more particularly as a piece of land near Noah's Ark is called by her name in the old maps. That she was born in Yorkshire during the early years of Henry the VII.'s reign is generally admitted. Her father, who was supposed to be a Breton follower of Henry, was named Sonthiel. His famous daughter married a respectable artisan, one Shipton, who came from a village thus called. She died in 1571, and was buried at Clifton in her native county, her epitaph running:

> Here lies she who never lied,
> Whose skill so often has been tried.
> Her prophecies shall still survive,
> And ever keep her name alive.

Her collected predictions first appeared in 1641. Twenty-six years afterwards Richard Head issued

a so-called 'Life' of her, together with many predictions, the authenticity of which is doubtful. Among the prophecies attributed to the sibyl is that

> Carriages without horses shall go,
> And accidents fill the world with woe.

The second part of the prediction does not argue any remarkable gift of second sight; with regard to the first, Friar Bacon had already forestalled Mother Shipton when he wrote of 'carriages without horses moving at an inestimable speed.' Somewhat similar to this is the following, which certainly seems to anticipate the girdle that Puck undertook to put round about the earth in forty minutes, not to mention Marconigrams, railway trains and tunnels:

> Around the world thoughts shall fly
> In the twinkling of an eye.
> Through the hills a man shall ride,
> And no horse be at his side.

These are not found in the edition of her 'Life and Prophecies,' published in 1797; neither is that which declares

> In eighteen hundred and eighty-one
> This world of ours to an end shall come,

which I do not think troubled us overmuch thirty years ago.

According to Richard Head, Mother Shipton must have been a fearsome sight to meet, particularly on a dark night. 'Her nose, which was of incredible length, having in it many crooks and turnings, was covered with pimples that gave out such a lustre in the dead of night that her nurse (when she was an infant) needed no other light. Her teeth could be seen through her cheeks like the notches in a valley, save two that stood out like the tusks of a wild boar; and her body was as though it had been screwed together piece by piece and not rightly placed. Her toes took to her left, and it was hard for any person to guess which way she meant to shape her course, because she never could look the way she resolved to go.'

As a piece of description the above is infinitely more valuable, if original, than if it followed simple truth. Head displays an equal power of imagination in the predictions he ascribes to Mother Shipton, the greater number having been composed after the event. Of those whose fulfilment he did not live to see the following are the most interesting:

> The Fiery Year, as soon as o'er,
> Peace shall then be as before;
> Plenty everywhere be found,
> And men with swords shall plough the ground.

The Fiery Year is 1666, when the Fire of London

burnt out the plague. The remainder of the picture is not easy to verify. Neither peace nor plenty were the dominant characteristics of the two later Stuarts' reigns nor of their immediate successors. Equally vague is the statement that

> The time shall come when seas of blood
> Shall mingle with a greater flood,
> Great noise there shall be heard, great shouts and cries,
> And seas shall thunder louder than the skies.
> Then shall three Lyons fight with three and bring
> Joy to a people, honour to their king.

The Lyon stands in the other prophecies for the royal standard of England or for the individual Englishman. Another curious, and happily unfulfilled, prediction is that 'A woman shall stand on London Bridge and say, "Here comes a man!"' such havoc had war wrought among husbands, sons, and brothers. Head's pages are defiled with unspeakable obscenities. One of his tales, however, deserves to be recorded for its raciness.

A certain young gallant, being 'pricked on by his friends' to fight in King Harry VIII.'s French wars, repaired to Mother Shipton to inquire whether the English arms would be successful. Her reply was that 'when the Lyon set his paw on the Gallic shore, the Lillies would droop and the ladies of that country weep and wail.' She went on to say that 'the dull animal of the North,'

by which pleasing figure she designated the inquirer, 'shall put the enemy to confusion, and though it be against his will, shall cause great shame unto them.' The fulfilment was on this wise. The young gallant being in the forefront of the battle, someone struck his horse, and the jade carried him perforce upon the enemy with such violence as to throw them into some disorder, whereupon the English rushed in and routed them off the field. The account reads like the Battle of the Spurs in 1513, when ten thousand of the French Cavalry fled headlong almost without striking a blow.

Mother Shipton lived to a good old age, and, notwithstanding her reputation as a witch, appears to have been respected by all who had the privilege of her acquaintance. Of the wonderful sayings which in my childhood I used to hear attributed to her—such as that England would be crossed and crossed with iron like a gridiron, that London Bridge would run with blood, I have found no trace either in authentic or in unauthentic records. On the whole, Friar Bacon, with his diving bells, oarless boats, and carriages without horses running at an incredible speed, has proved the more reliable seer.

'Noah's Ark' as regards its outward appearance —of its interior I cannot speak—is 'nothen to mek

a fuss about,' being an ordinary country inn set down for the convenience of man and beast (it is surprising how solicitous about the watering of their animals carters, drovers and shepherds become when a 'public' creeps into view) beside the road, on a little rising ground above a green, snake-like water-course.

The stream we have already met, once in Cerdic's Island, once at the outset of our journey. It is 'Ocke Broke that goith to A—— risinge in the Vale,' and at this point you will remember we parted company with the King's Antiquary. Now may you follow him, an you will, towards the Downs and the noonday sun; you may turn eastward with the river that runs to the sea; you may obey the call of the beckoning spires beyond the low northern hills; or you may plunge once more into the solitary thickets of the Vale. North, south, east or west, I wish you Godspeed, for here I bid you farewell, trusting you have enjoyed my company as much as I have enjoyed yours.

But, some will object, you have shown us only one side of the Islands; and in a sense the objectors will be right. I have shown the side that is best worth showing—the side that will live. Those who know human nature, know full well that it is the same in country and town; that nowhere it is

perfect we have but to look into our own hearts to discover.

Moreover, I have excellent warrant for abstaining from bringing before you certain aspects of village life, with which we are all acquainted, which the right-minded deplore. 'Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report—think on these things.'

After all, why should one insist on holding up evil—unless to try and cure it—which is destructible and transitory? Whereas Good endures to the ends of the Ages.

There shall never be one lost good! What was shall live as before.
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.

GOOD-BYE.

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